







Military Advocacy Service:

Interim Evaluation Report

December 2019







Foreword

Few would argue that living comfortably in modern society or trying to bring up a family in an increasingly complex world is easy. The pressures attached to achieving secure and sustainable accommodation, managing stretched personal and family budgets, or navigating complex health and social care bureaucracies are challenges that affect us all even if we have secure employment, enjoy stable and supportive relationships within our families or have had no adverse contact with the criminal justice system.

However, many find the institutions and conventions of modern society too difficult and confusing to manage. And many will find that while coping most of the time, occasionally circumstances beyond their control have destabilised their lives in some respect and temporarily 'de-railed' their capacity to engage with local authorities, landlords, the health system, the DWP, and the many other organisations that order our interaction with civil society.

Forces in Mind Trust is well aware that the ex-Service community, consisting of veterans and their families, can find it difficult to adapt to the move from life in the Armed Forces to civilian society. Nearly 15,000 personnel leave the Armed Forces each year as part of 'normal work force churn' and contribute to the current estimate of 2.5 million 'veterans and dependants' in society at large. Though great strides have been made to help prepare transitioning personnel and their families, including the Ministry of Defence's recent launch of its Defence Transition Services and associated policy, there is an enduring need for support services who understand the challenges and needs of the ex-Service community and can provide practical help at the right time.

We recognise the considerable support the wider military charity sector plays in addressing this need. But we also recognise that for many veterans, seeking help is itself a very difficult step to take, and the system can appear confusing to navigate. And it is here that advocacy services, knowledgeable and tuned to the background, experience and requirements of the ex-Service community can play a vital role.

Forces in Mind Trust welcomes this evaluation of the Military Advocacy Service provided by SERIO on behalf of seAp Advocacy. We believe that well targeted advocacy can complement the range of support provided by charities and be valuable in providing discreet, one to one support where it can be most effective. This is a useful tool in the armoury of support services for our veterans which I strongly commend readers to consider carefully.



Thomas McBarnet, Director of Programmes Forces in Mind Trust



Executive Summary

SERIO, an applied research unit at the University of Plymouth, is conducting a rigorous and independently verified evaluation of seAp's Military Advocacy Service (mAs).

mAs was developed in response to a gap in specialist provision for military veterans and their families. It is a service intended to recognise the complexity of its clients' needs, and aims to offer more intense, specialist support than is available elsewhere. mAs aims to be a more open and flexible service, capable of addressing a wide range of issues. It offers a practical and resilience building model of support, designed to empower individuals who engage with the service to find solutions and deal with their life issues, whatever they may be, in order to help them get their lives back on course. mAs endeavours to 'walk alongside' all clients, assisting them in navigating the myriad of agencies and services available to them, seAp conveys belief in the power of its peer-delivered military advocacy model to transform people's lives, and wishes for it to become a statutory service which would be available to all veterans in England.

To this end, seAp is seeking to broaden the understanding of military advocacy, and its potential social and financial benefits, held by government, national organisations and a wider audience.

This service evaluation aims to gather findings and evidence around the effectiveness of mAs. This evaluation will clearly demonstrate, where evidence is uncovered, the impact of advocacy, as well as making a significant contribution to the general understanding of advocacy more widely. The interim report presented here builds on the early findings report produced last year. The methodological approach has broadened since the initial exploration, widening to include interviews with delivery staff; a greater level of participation from both Advocates and clients, focus groups; more in depth analysis; and the production of additional case studies. It also now takes on board the external stakeholder voice.

KEY FINDINGS

Operational Data

- During the period 1st April 2017 to 31st July 2019, mAs worked with a total of 382 individual clients (actioning a total of 764 unique cases, 160 of which were active at the time of reporting).
- 85.83% of cases came from veterans during this time, with a further 2.54% of cases from serving personnel and just 0.27% from reservists. 5.21% of cases related to a family member and 6.15% from those in the capacity of carer. 161 cases are known to relate to those who had a medical discharge from service.
- Where response time was recorded, 84% of cases were responded to within 36 hours (n=641). A considerable 63% of cases were allocated within 24 hours, with 78% allocated within 60 hours (n=764).
- In terms of the primary service issues clients are presenting with, cases relating to benefits are the most dominant at 33% of cases, followed by 'Health and Social Care' and 'Housing and Homelessness' at 18% of cases each (n=711).
- The vast majority of cases (77.9%) were closed due to having reached a natural conclusion or having progressed as far as they could. 8.1% of cases needed to be closed due to a lack of engagement from the client in the process, and a further 4.3% because the client expressed a wish not to continue on the journey further.



Service Delivery

- Changes in management structures; bringing Advocates together to reduce isolation; and enhanced supervisory practices of late have benefitted service delivery, and resulted in the smoother operation of mAs.
- The added value mAs brings has been widely acknowledged by clients, Advocates and stakeholders alike, with clear evidence that it is filling a gap in existing service provision.
- A need for heightened awareness of the service, and further promotion of the service through new avenues was expressed by evaluation participants, including clients, Advocates, management and external stakeholders. External stakeholders felt that it was important to increase awareness of the service so as to enable more veterans to self-refer and benefit from the service, rather than relying on other organisations to recommend mAs and refer clients.
- There is also an appetite for doing more preventative work, and reaching service leavers at the point at which they are returning to civilian life, ensuring a safety net is in place before they are at risk of crisis escalation.
- There remains a need for an enhanced and consistent narrative which captures the mAs service, and the additionality it brings to the veteran support sector, in order to effectively communicate the offering to stakeholders, potential clients, and external bodies.
- There is appetite for a greater level of service coverage, both in terms of geographical reach, and the proportion of mAs Advocates operating within service areas. Frustration arises when people in need have to be turned away owing to their residential address lying beyond mAs service area boundaries.

Service Experience

 Results from the client survey show that clients' satisfaction levels with the seAp service are very high. 96% of those who answered this question (n=75) were either 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with the seAp service overall.

- Respondents also rated Advocates' help very highly, with 94.7% of those who responded (n=75) stating they found their Advocate 'Very Helpful', and a further 2.7% conveying that their Advocate was 'Helpful.'
- For over half of the clients interviewed (17), having the knowledge that mAs was specifically focussed on supporting veterans was an important reason to get involved in the service.
- A number of clients reported that their reluctance to access support in the past derived mainly from previous negative experiences and an unwillingness to accept that they needed support. Several clients reported having been let down by other organisations in the past, affecting their capacity to trust services.
- Other clients reported that their military background and their pride precluded them from seeking support, as they were expected to be strong and resilient.
- Some clients mentioned that feeling that someone was 'fighting their corner', and 'giving them a voice' were highlights of their participation in the programme.
- For a number of clients, the Advocates'
 demeanour was a key aspect of the positive
 experience they had using the service. Service
 users noted that Advocates' professionalism and
 compassion were fundamental in engaging with
 clients in difficult circumstances without being
 condescending.
- When asked to compare mAs to other available support, clients felt that the mAs support was better than other support services they had accessed in the past for several reasons. Interviewees commented that the military focus of the service was helpful as it spoke the veterans' 'language' and understood their 'culture.'
- 23 (out of 25) clients said that they would recommend the service to other veterans, as they had a positive experience with an organisation they trust.

mAs Impact and Service Outcomes

- Analysis of evidence from mAs clients continues to demonstrate the profound impact the service is having on their lives, and on their families' lives.
- Notable improvements have been recorded for mAs clients across all impact measures examined, using both the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) and seAp's own impact measurement scale.
- A 23% uplift in mean SWEMWBS score was recorded for 'I've been dealing with problems well', with further uplifts ranging between 10% and 19%.
- Results for the validated SWEMWBS measure have also been analysed by looking solely at directionality of outcome, regardless of size of uplift. These show that the proportion recording a positive change in trajectory across the different measures ranges from 37.5% (making up my own mind about things) to 52.1% (dealing with problems well). No more than 12% recorded a negative shift on any measure, and this was as low as 6.4% regarding optimism about the future. The total mean score across all seven measures recorded at the final stage is 22.12, up from 19.12 (For context, the UK average is 23.7 (23.2 for men)).
- The greatest improvements in seAp's own impact scale were observed with respect to feeling 'listened to', and being 'kept informed.' 45% and 43% respectively moved into the 'Sometimes' or 'Mostly/ Always' response categories on these measures over the course of their involvement with the service, indicating they were assisted in finding their voice through mAs.
- Results for seAp's own impact scale have also been analysed by looking solely at directionality of outcome, regardless of size of uplift. These show that the proportion recording a positive change in trajectory across the different measures ranges from 44.7% (feeling confident to speak up) to 61.3% (feeling they're being kept informed). No more than 6.7% recorded a negative shift on any measure, and this was as low as 0.7% regarding being kept informed.

- The primary service outcomes are in line with the service issues presented by clients, with successful benefit appeals accounting for 11%, and successful initial applications for a further 10%. Overall, 87% of service outcomes recorded represent a positive outcome, with just 13% relating to complaints which were not upheld, unsuccessful applications or benefit appeals, unsuccessful mandatory reconsiderations, declines or, in one case, the loss of a home.
- A number of positive outcomes were recorded with respect to housing and homelessness. In 21 cases, permanent accommodation was accessed. In 16 cases, housing support was put in place, and there were also seven cases where eviction/ tenancy loss was avoided.
- In the period April 2017 to end-July 2019, positive financial outcomes for mAs clients were recorded for 140 cases. Figures collated show £52,835 in debt written off; £175,600 in grants and other financial awards achieved; and annualised pension gains totalling £548,345. Overall, recorded positive financial gains were approaching £900,000 for the period.
- In total, 18 (out of 25) clients reported that their attitude to accessing support had changed positively as a result of their participation in mAs.
- Another important change reported by clients
 was the positive impact on their mental health.
 Although clients acknowledged that mental health
 issues are complex and take time to address,
 working with Advocates has alleviated some of
 the pressure and isolation that compound mental
 health issues.



Stakeholder Relations: Networking and Capacity Building

- There is evidence of capacity building, that understanding of the mAs offering is increasing, and that the service is becoming more widely known. Stakeholders commented on the effective working relationships they hold with mAs, and Advocates feel that seAp and mAs' names have become more widely known, and people are more aware of the services being offered. Advocates also reported how they are working to increase the integration and coordination of support for veterans.
- External stakeholders reported that they view mAs' offering as complementary to or built upon the support that their own organisation offers veterans, with referrals being a two-way process in many instances. Advocates concurred, reporting their view that mAs complements other projects and programmes in its service delivery areas
- External stakeholders felt that the importance of mAs was a result of the knowledge of mAs and its Advocates, and thus their ability to inform veterans of their entitlements and available support.
- External stakeholders also expressed that mAs
 is important for the sector due to its ability to be
 flexible and responsive to needs, compared to
 larger organisations which are more limited in
 their remit, and in their ability to provide more
 intensive support.



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1. Introduction

Background to mAs

seAp's Military Advocacy Service (mAs) was developed in response to a gap in specialist provision for military veterans and their families. It is a service intended to recognise the complexity of its clients' needs, and aims to provide more intense, specialist support than is available elsewhere. mAs aims to be a more open and flexible service, capable of addressing a wide range of issues. It offers a practical and resilience building model of support, designed with the aim of empowering individuals who engage with the service to find solutions and deal with their life issues, whatever they may be, in order to help them get their lives back on course. mAs endeavours to 'walk alongside' all clients, assisting them in navigating the myriad of agencies and services available to them.

Key to mAs, and a unique aspect of its operations in the military sector, is that it is a peer-delivered military advocacy service offering long-term solutions. Most of the Advocates employed on the project have direct experience of military service themselves; they can 'speak the language' of their clients, and can readily relate to clients' perspectives and life experiences. Advocates, involved in a paid employment capacity, aim to give clients a voice, supporting them to negotiate their next steps, whilst addressing the barriers that are holding them back.



Context for the Evaluation

seAp strongly believes in the power of mAs to transform people's lives, and wishes for it to become a statutory service which would be available to all veterans in England. To this end, it is seeking to broaden the understanding of military advocacy, and its many social and financial benefits, held by government, national organisations and a wider audience. It wishes for the value and impact of military advocacy to be better understood overall. In order to explore the impact of its service, seAp commissioned a rigorous and independently verified evaluation of its Military Advocacy Service. This ongoing evaluation, which is being conducted by SERIO, an applied research unit at the University of Plymouth, is gathering a solid and credible evidence base to learn more about mAs, so that the impact of military advocacy can be thoroughly explored; any benefits and disbenefits to service users identified; and the change the service aims to bring about for veterans and their families clearly demonstrated. The evaluation focusses on each of the five current service delivery areas - Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire; Plymouth, Devon and Torbay; Wiltshire: Berkshire East and North Hampshire: and Essex. This interim phase of the evaluation, presented in this report, has captured the voices of both Advocates and the military veteran clients they engage with, as well as the views held by both the delivery team and wider sector stakeholders. Future evaluation activity will include a social return on investment analysis, something which will be crucial in contributing to the evidence base in support of military advocacy services, quantifying the social, environmental and economic value mAs is generating through its efforts.

seAp and SERIO wish to extend warm thanks to all veterans who kindly gave up their time to contribute to the evaluation. Their willingness to be interviewed, and to share their stories has been much appreciated. We look forward to engaging further with the veteran community as the evaluation progresses through to the final stage.

Evaluation Report Structure

This report presents interim findings for the mAs evaluation, highlighting the impact which the service is having, but also providing learning points in order to contribute to a culture of continuous improvement and enhance seAp's offering. This is in recognition of the fact that each iteration of evaluation reporting provides an opportunity to develop and enrich service delivery, and consequently intensify the impact being felt by those who choose avail of the mAs offering going forward.

The report begins with an outline of the evaluation methodology which has been employed in order to generate the findings presented here. The main body of the report then moves to present evaluation findings, focusing initially on a review of monitoring data supplied to SERIO by seAp, which covers both operational data and service impact data.

The next section focusses on the client voice, drawing together findings from the mAs client interviews and focus groups.

This is followed in the subsequent section by an analysis of interviews carried out with mAs Advocates, in order to take into account their perspective on the service, both its operational delivery and its impact on clients who avail of it. The following section summarises findings from interviews with key mAs delivery staff from the seAp organisation.

Also new to this wave of reporting is the subsequent section which addresses the wider stakeholder view, drawing together insight acquired from a number of external organisations who engage with mAs in different ways, and have knowledge of the service and the wider sector.

A concluding section, which addresses key learning points; comments on any limitations of the evaluation work; and highlights some implications for future evaluation efforts, draws the report to a close. This section provides an opportunity to reflect on what has worked well, but also what can be improved upon in order to enhance the mAs service offering going forward.

Three case studies prepared by SERIO have also been supplied together with this report.

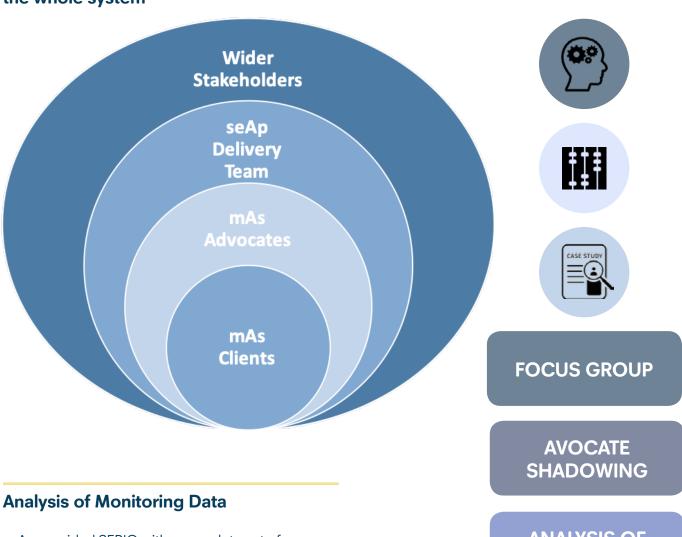


2. Evaluation Methodology

The Evaluation Approach

The interim evaluation of mAs adopted a mixed methods approach in order to gather insight. Fieldwork began in May and concluded in September. Qualitative interviews took place with participants across the whole system, including clients of the service; Advocates delivering the service; key mAs delivery team members from seAp; and a wide range of external organisations who have knowledge of mAs and its offering. These interviews were complemented with a focus group, a half day of Advocate shadowing, case study development, and an analysis of monitoring data supplied to SERIO by seAp. Further information on the sampling and recruitment approaches employed is outlined overleaf.

Qualitative tele-depth interviews across the whole system



seAp provided SERIO with a complete set of monitoring data from their system in August, covering the time period April 2017 to August 2019. Operational and impact scale data presented in this report has been based on analysis of that data carried out by SERIO. Additional data presented has been sourced from seAp's internal client survey results, independently analysed by SERIO.

ANALYSIS OF MONITORING DATA

CASE STUDIES

Qualitative Telephone Interviews

mAs Clients

SERIO interviewed a total of 25 mAs clients from across all five service areas. With the exception of one case in Essex and three cases in Wiltshire, all of these participants self-selected by responding to a service-wide client mailshot inviting people to take part in the evaluation. The four cases which were not recruited in this way were sourced by Advocates, in order to assist SERIO in reaching a target of engaging with 25 clients across the service. The table below illustrates which service areas the 25 participants were recruited from.



Service Area	Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire	Essex	Plymouth, Devon and Torbay	Wiltshire	Berkshire East and North Hampshire
Interviews	6	6	4	5	4

Advocates

In-depth telephone interviews were held with 11 Advocates in total, working in the following areas: Berkshire East and North Hampshire (3); Essex (2); Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire (2); Plymouth, Devon and Torbay (2); and Wiltshire (2).

seAp Delivery Team

Five tele-depth interviews were conducted with members of the seAp team who have responsibility for the delivery of mAs.

Wider Stakeholders

A total of 24 external stakeholders were engaged for telephone interview over the course the evaluation. This was carried out to ensure a wider sectoral view was captured, and to allow input from external organisations who engage with mAs.



Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with three clients of mAs in the Oxford region during the month of August. These clients expressed a willingness to take part in a focus group in response to the service-wide client mailshot, and were subsequently contacted by SERIO to arrange the fieldwork.

Advocate Shadowing

One Advocate in the Plymouth region was shadowed for half a day delivering their Veterans' Awareness Training, in order to capture further insight into the role of an Advocate.

Case Studies

Throughout the client interview phase, SERIO selected three participants whose stories were suitable for case study development. These case studies have been prepared in the first person, allowing the participants to give an account of their experiences, and to convey the manner in which the service impacted on their lives, and also on their families' lives.

3. Monitoring Data Results

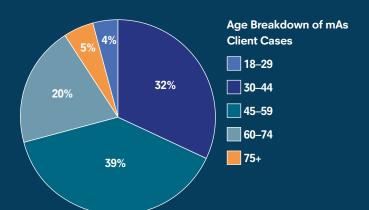
seAp provided SERIO with a wide range of monitoring data, collected and stored on their internally managed CRM system. It was comprised largely of operational data and impact scale data. Additionally, results from an internal client survey were supplied. This section outlines the main findings from SERIO's analysis of this data.

Demographic Data

During the period 1st April 2017 to 31st July 2019, mAs worked with a total of 382 individual clients (actioning a total of 764 unique cases, 160 of which were active at the time of reporting). The breakdown of this 764 case total by service area is shown below, with the Oxfordshire area leading the way servicing approximately 43% of cases, followed by Essex and Plymouth with 20% and 17% respectively.

Entitlement	Subtotals
Oxfordshire mAs	330
Essex mAs	150
Plymouth mAs	131
Berkshire mAs	83
Wiltshire mAs	57
Devon mAs	8
Out of Area mAs	5

The age breakdown of cases is presented in the pie chart below, with cases from those aged 45-59 comprising the largest share at 39% (n=725).





80% of actioned cases relate to male clients (n=713), and 79% to people of white British origin (n=705). 30% of cases come from married clients, with 26% reporting to be single, and a further 14% described as divorced or having dissolved a civil partnership (n=706). The remainder are either cohabiting (7%); in a civil partnership (1%); separated (9%); widowed (3%); or status unknown (10%).

85.83% of cases came from veterans during this time, with a further 2.54% of cases from serving personnel and just 0.27% from reservists. 5.21% of cases related to a family member and 6.15% from those in the capacity of carer. 161 cases are known to relate to those who had a medical discharge from service. Where recorded, 80% of cases were identified as Army, with a further 12.5% from the Royal Navy and 7.4% from the Royal Air Force.

Where a health issue was identified, the most common problems related to mental health in 64% of 555 cases. This was followed by physical disabilities in 28% of cases with client health problems, and acquired brain injuries in 4% of cases. A summary table of results is provided below.

Main Health Issue	Subtotals
Mental health problem	356
Physical disability	155
Acquired brain injury	22
Asperger's/Autism spectrum condition	5
Cognitive impairment	5
Sensory (sight)	4
Dementia/Alzheimer's	3
Learning disability	2
Serious physical illness	2
Sensory (hearing)	1

The table below summarises where clients who engage with mAs reside (n=688). The vast majority reported living in their own home (71%), with a further 18% residing in their own home with support. Just 5% reported being either homeless or with no fixed abode.

Client residence	Subtotals
Own home	489
Own home with support	121
Homeless	19
Other institution	15
No fixed abode	14
Supporting living	12
Hospital	7
Acute psychiatric unit	5
Forensic secure unit	3
Care/nursing home	2
Dementia ward	1



Operational Data

In total, close to 8,000 hours of mAs work has been logged in the system by Advocates during the period 1st April 2017 to 31st July 2019, with the table below displaying which activities those entries relate to.

Action	Entries
Client contact – email/letter/phone	5,234
Generic case admin	2,708
Referral/triage	1,172
Consult externally	1,093
Client contact – meeting	867
Contact on behalf of client	794
Case supervision	717
Consult colleagues	626
Travel – client visit	454
Client contact – no response	416
Obtaining/reviewing information	352
Post uploaded	232
Meeting – client and professionals	176
Case closure review	169
Technical file review	153
Report writing	134
Post uploaded	105
Travel – generic	89
Risk assessment	83
Feedback	74
Compliment	30
Safeguarding alert	11
Escalated call	8
Meeting – other	6
Travel – out of area	2
Admin (non-client) general	1
Decision challenged	1
Meeting – local resolution	1

Where response time was recorded, 84% of cases were responded to within 36 hours (n=641). A considerable 63% of cases were allocated within 24 hours, with 78% allocated within 60 hours (n=764). Just 1% of these 764 cases were described as inappropriate referrals.

Where signposting was recorded separately from time logs (29 cases), destinations included CAB, GP surgeries, other support organisations or medicolegal advice and other internal seAp services.

Referral Sources

In terms of referral sources, the following table provides a summary for cases between April 2018 and August 2019 (n=700). As can be seen from the table, the greatest source of referrals comes from mAs itself (41%), with previous clients and self-referral coming in at 10% and 9% respectively.



Referral Organisation (April 2018–August 2019)	Subtotals
mAs	284
Previous client	69
Self-referral	64
seAp	46
NHS	34
Royal British Legion	32
NHS Veterans' Mental Health TILS	24
SSAFA	22
Council	18
Veterans UK	17
Word of mouth	12
Livewell S/W	8
Help for Heroes	7
Combat Stress	6
Healthwatch	6
Aspire	4
Julian House	4
Citizens Advice Bureau	3
Other community premises	3
RFEA	3
Selwood Housing	3
Department for Work and Pensions	2
Homestart Kennet	2
Improving Lives Plymouth	2
Nacro Housing	2
Plymouth Adult Social Care	2
Rethink Mental Illness	2
Shelter Plymouth	2
South Central Veterans' Service	2
Alabare Christian Care and Support	1
Buckingham Veterans Group	1
CB Homes Essex	1
Deaf Blind UK	1
Defence Medical Welfare Service	1
MND	1
Plymouth Highbury Trust	1
Signal for Carers	1
Sopra Steria	1
Upper Heyford and Bicester Veterans Group	1
Veterans' Change Partnership	1
Veterans' Gateway	1
Walking with the Wounded	1
Warrior Programme for Veterans	1
Wolferstans Solicitors	1
Wolferstalls Solicitors	

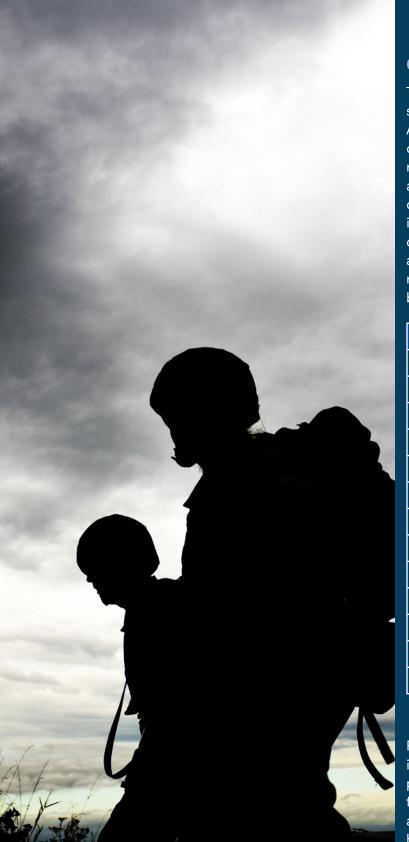
Service Issues

The primary service issues clients are presenting with are summarised in the table below, with cases relating to benefits the most dominant at 33% of cases, followed by 'Health and Social Care' and 'Housing and Homelessness' at 18% of cases each (n=711).

Service issue	Subtotals
Benefits	238
Health and Social Care	128
Housing and Homelessness	127
Legal/ Finance	83
Debt and Budgeting	43
Jobs/ Training/ Education/ Volnteering	30
Military Service Complaint	17
Relationships	17
Social Networks/ Activities	17
Criminal Justice System	11

The specific kinds of issues clients are presenting with under these headings can relate to, for example, financial issues such as supporting clients in their engagement with DWP/ HMRC; supporting them in accessing and presenting legal documents or completing benefit applications; assisting them in engaging with legal representation or creditors; support through tribunal proceedings; and contacting pension authorities. Health service issues can be around accessing care packages and treatment programmes, and assisting clients in challenging health/ social care assessments. In terms of housing, clients may need support with avoiding eviction/ tenancy loss; accessing permanent accommodation; clearing rent arrears; and having aids and adaptations carried out at their existing properties.





Case Closure

The primary recorded reasons for case closure are summarized below for the period March 2017 to August 2019, and highlight that in the vast majority of cases (77.9%) they were closed due to having reached a natural conclusion or having progressed as far as they could. 8.1% of cases needed to be closed due to a lack of engagement from the client in the process, and a further 4.3% because the client expressed an explicit wish not to continue to access the service further. Reasons for closure of the remaining 9.7% of cases are displayed in the table below.

Reason for case closure	No.	%
Case concluded	294	66.4
Case gone as far as it can	51	11.5
Client not responding/ engaging during process	36	8.1
Client feels does not need/ want to continue	19	4.3
Client now supported elsewhere	15	3.4
Case not within remit/ inappropriate	12	2.7
Client self-advocating	3	0.7
Client exhausted with process	2	0.5
No contact details	2	0.5
Client refuses referral	1	0.2
Client unable to continue for personal reasons	1	0.2
Other	7	1.6
Total	443	100

Reasons for cases having gone as far as they can include, for example, client withdrawal from the process; clients having found their own solutions or feeling they no longer needed support; requests for a break from the process owing to poor mental health; or simply an inability to progress a case any further. As part of the process, multiple attempts are made to re-engage clients and progress cases before reaching a point of case closure where the desired outcome has not yet been achieved. Where clients went on to be supported by other organisations, these included, for example, CAB, ILP, RBL, WWTW, SSAFA, RMI, HfH, Rethink, Aspire, TILS or other public sector departments for case management.

Service issue outcome detail	Subtotals
Successful benefit appeal	55
Successful initial application	48
Engaged with other organisation	38
Access to service agreed	36
Complaint not upheld	35
Permanent accommodation accessed	21
Complaint upheld/partially upheld	17
Housing support in place	16
Debt subject to repayment agreements	16
Unsuccessful initial application	15
Pension issue dealt with	12
Care package/treatment programme in place	12
Unsuccessful benefit appeal	8
Grants accessed to pay off debt	8
Client accesses relationship advice	8
Eviction/ tenancy loss avoided	7
Client accesses training	7
Debt written off	6
Client sustains engagement with treatment programme	5
Financial product accessed	5
Reassessed care package/treatment programme in place	5
Client engages with veterans support group	5
Aids and adaptations carried out	5
Cheaper service accessed	3
Cheaper item accessed	3
Unsuccessful mandatory reconsideration	3
Client gets job	3
Declined	3
Client conforming to court order	2
Client accesses education	2
Client accesses social activity	1
Successful mandatory reconsideration	1
Restorative justice engaged with	1
Bank account opened	1
Client loses home	1
Financial support to help with moving home/ setting up home accessed	1
Temporary accommodation accessed	1
Tax issue successfully dealt with	1
Rent arrears partially cleared	1
Mobility EPV/Car	1
Eviction/tenancy loss delayed	1
Other	75

Service Outcomes

The table, on the left, displays service outcomes for mAs clients during the period April 2017 to end-July 2019 (n=495). As can be seen from the table below, the primary outcomes are in line with the service issues presented earlier, with successful benefit appeals accounting for 11%, and successful initial applications for a further 10%. Overall, 87% of outcomes listed below represent a positive outcome, with just 13% relating to complaints which were not upheld, unsuccessful applications or benefit appeals, unsuccessful mandatory reconsiderations, declines or, in one case, the loss of a home. A service outcome summary table is also provided to highlight the main outcome categories.

Service issue outcome summary	Subtotals
Financial issue progressed/resolved	159
Signposting to organisation or service	74
Unsuccessful outcome	65
Housing issue progressed/resolved	53
Health/care issue progressed/resolved	22
Complaint upheld/ partially upheld	17
Networking/ relationship issue progressed/ resolved	14
Access to education/ training/ employment	12
Client conforming to court order/engaging with restorative justice	3
Mobility EPV/Car	1
Other	75



Financial Impact

In the same period of April 2017 to end-July 2019, there were 140 cases which recorded a positive financial outcome for clients. Results collated show £52,835 in debt written off; £175,600 in grants and other financial awards including benefits achieved; and annualised pension gains totalling £548,345 recorded. Overall, recorded positive financial gains were approaching £900,000 for the period. A summary of financial gain across the different fiscal outcomes achieved for mAs clients has been included in the table below, and is based on positive financial outcomes recorded for 127 cases.

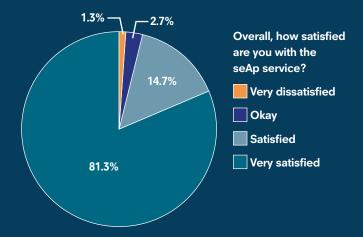
Financial outcome	Total amount	
Debt written off	£52,835	
Debt subject to agreement	£20,500	
Grants gained	£11,350	
Other financial awards including benefits	£164,250	
Pension gained lump sum	£101,200	
Pension gained annualised	£548,345	

mAs Advocates continue to inform veterans of their financial rights and entitlements, supporting them with applications and appeals processes.

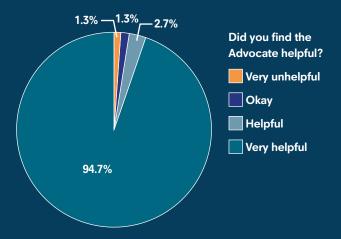
"Because of our involvement, veterans come out with the right pension/entitlement. There is a greater recognition of their rights. Setting out what options exist, we support them in finding the way they need to go."

Client Survey Results

Results from the client survey (to which all clients are invited to complete) show that clients' satisfaction levels with the seAp service are very high. 96% of those who answered this question (n=75) were either 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with the seAp service overall.



Respondents also rated Advocates' help very highly, with 94.7% of those who responded (n=75) stating they found their Advocate 'Very Helpful', and a further 2.7% conveying that their Advocate was 'Helpful.'

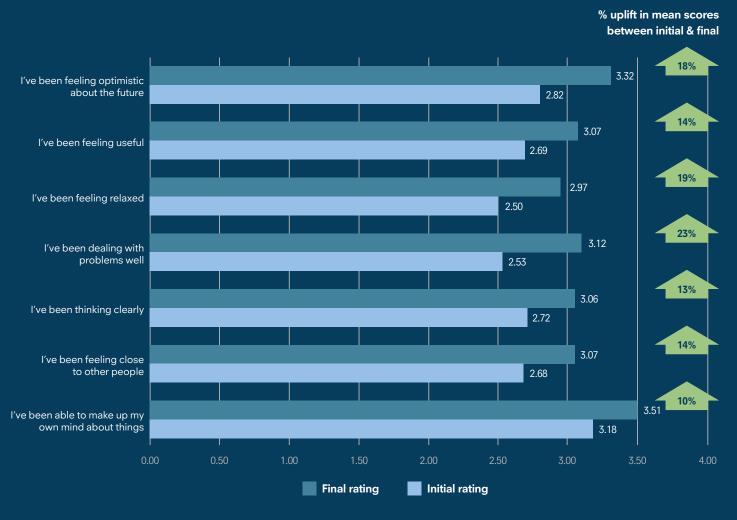


All of those who responded to the question as to whether or not they would recommend seAp (n=74) stated that they would do so.

Clients were also presented with a series of questions exploring what difference advocacy support has made to them. 82% reported feeling more confident since engaging with mAs (total n=61), whilst 58.5% believed they felt more in control of their lives (total n=53). 35.6% reported feeling in better health (total n=45), and a considerable 62% noted that their mental wellbeing is now better (total n=50).

Impact: The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)

Clients of mAs have been completing the validated SWEMWBS measure as part of seAp's ongoing data collection exercise with all those who engage with the service. As can be seen from the graph below, notable improvements have been recorded across all measures since the scale was introduced up to August 2nd 2019. The graph includes data for between 87 and 94 cases across all measures, with only cases where valid initial and final scores were recorded included in the analysis for each measure. Scores are recorded between one and five, with five the optimum score on each measure. The chart presents before and after mean scores, with the percentage uplift depicted by the green arrows. A 23% uplift in mean SWEMWBS score was recorded for 'I've been dealing with problems well.' The total mean score across all seven measures recorded at the final stage is 22.12, up from 19.12 (For context, the UK average is 23.7 (23.2 for men)).

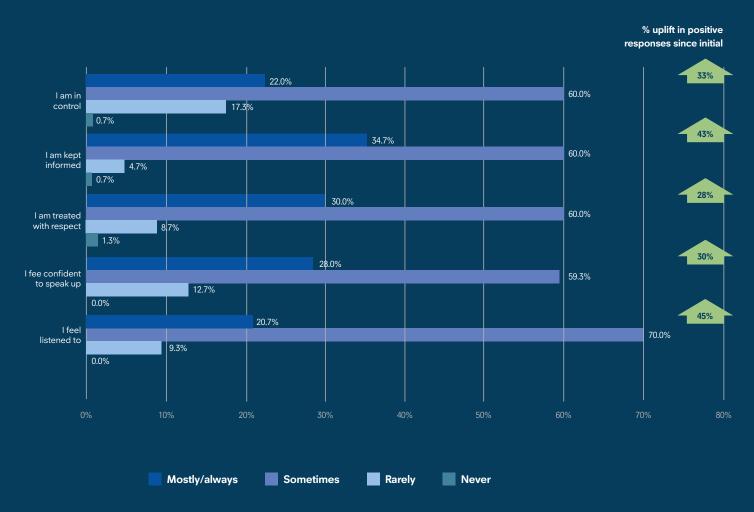


Results for the validated SWEMWBS measure have also been analysed by looking solely at directionality of outcome, regardless of size of uplift. These are presented below, and show that the proportion recording a positive change in trajectory across the different measures ranges from 37.5% (making up my own mind about things) to 52.1% (dealing with problems well). No more than 12% recorded a negative shift on any measure, and this was as low as 6.4% regarding optimism about the future.

	I've been feeling optimistic about the future	l've been feeling useful	I've been feeling relaxed	I've been dealing with problems well	I've been thinging clearly	I've been feeling close to other people	I've been able to make up my own mind about things
Negative change	6.4%	11.7%	12.0%	8.5%	10.6%	10.9%	10.2%
No change	47.9%	44.7%	46.7%	39.4%	51.1%	44.6%	52.3%
Positive change	45.7%	43.6%	41.3%	52.1%	38.3%	44.6%	37.5%

Impact: mAs Impact Scale

Participants were also asked a number of impact related questions, using a scale developed by seAp, as illustrated by the chart below. Again, without exception, positive trajectory was recorded across all measures. This chart shows the final impact scores recorded for participants at case closure, with the percentage increases in positive responses ('Mostly/ Always' or 'Sometimes') since the initial scores highlighted in green. The graph includes data for 150 cases across all measures dating back to 2017, with only cases where valid initial and final scores were recorded included in the analysis for each measure. As can be seen from the graph, the greatest improvements were observed with respect to feeling 'listened to', and being 'kept informed.' 45% and 43% respectively moved into the 'Sometimes' or 'Mostly/ Always' response categories on these measures over the course of their involvement with the service, indicating they found their voice through mAs.



Results for seAp's own impact scale have also been analysed by looking solely at directionality of outcome, regardless of size of uplift. These are presented below, and show that the proportion recording a positive change in trajectory across the different measures ranges from 44.7% (feeling confident to speak up) to 61.3% (feeling they're being kept informed). No more than 6.7% recorded a negative shift on any measure, and this was as low as 0.7% regarding being kept informed.

	I feel listened to	l feel confident to speak up	I am treated with respect	l am kept informed	l am in control
Negative change	1.3%	6.7%	3.3%	0.7%	2.0%
No change	42.7%	48.7%	49.3%	38.0%	50.0%
Positive change	56.07%	44.7%	47.3%	61.3%	48.0%

4. The Client Voice

In total, SERIO conducted 25 interviews with mAs clients, all of which took place over the telephone and during the time period June to August 2019. The majority of interviews lasted for approximately one hour.

Interview topic guides were designed in order to elicit clients' understanding of the mAs programme, its impact, and areas of the programme that worked well or less well. All 25 interviews were audio recorded and analysed in order to inform the interim evaluation report.

Clients' Motivation to Use mAs

For over half of the clients interviewed (17), having the knowledge that mAs was specifically focussed on supporting veterans was an important reason to get involved in the service. For other clients (4), the advocacy element was key to their involvement in the programme. In particular, clients highlighted the importance of having someone to speak on their behalf when they are having difficulties communicating.



"An Advocate is someone who can speak on your behalf if you are having difficulties communicating with organisations, whereas a Support Worker provides support when I need it" (Anna, f).

Anna (f), the elderly wife of an ex-serviceman suffering with dementia, expressed that:

"seAp supports me speaking on my behalf because I don't feel I have been heard, especially speaking with care services."

Betty (f), an ex-servicewoman who suffered a brain haemorrhage and became disabled, described how "They are advocating for me in meetings, speaking on my behalf, getting involved if I need more support."

Some highlighted the importance of the programme's focus on veterans, describing the particular difficulties they face:

Conor (m), who is currently still engaging with the service which he found via Facebook, has previously been homeless and suffered from isolation issues, and is struggling to engage with social services and manage finances, expressed that "Basically, because I am ex-military, I have certain elements from the military; I find it difficult to communicate with people. seAp makes things easier for me so I don't have to struggle."

"seAp is like a bridge between veterans and services; a voice for veterans who are unable, for whatever reason, to access the services or benefits they are entitled to, like mental health, physical health, etc" (Betty, f).

Dirk (m), an ex-serviceman facing ongoing financial and legal issues, outlined how "I am dyslexic, I don't have family around me, I stand alone. [The Advocate] asking questions on my behalf was a huge help."

In addition to issues relating to their service, clients approached mAs seeking support with a variety of issues including housing; finance; mental and physical health; family issues; social services; benefits (e.g. war pension, Personal Independent Payment (PIP)); disability; social isolation; alcohol dependency; and work. Discussing their current circumstances, a number of clients noted that some of the issues they were facing required long-term support, and described the role mAs played in alleviating the present pressure they were experiencing:

Eddie (m), currently navigating the PIP system having experienced a breakdown last year, described how "With PTSD, to be honest with you, seAp has made it a lot easier. I didn't have the energy to deal with all of this on my own."

Frank (m) is dealing with a range of complex issues whilst holding down full time employment – mental health issues and suspected PTSD, as well as ongoing legal, financial and housing issues. He described how, "For now, I am stable and going in the right direction."



Gareth (m) described how "I feel okay with seAp's support, but I still struggle with depression." Their difficulties started when trying to sort out their pension and benefit entitlements, and they are currently going through an appeal process with a PIP tribunal.

Understanding of Support Available

Interviewees had knowledge of a range of support organisations. Although most of the interviewees were familiar with or had used several of these at different points, a few clients reported not having accessed any of these organisations in the past.

A number of clients reported that their reluctance to access support in the past derived mainly from previous negative experiences and an unwillingness to accept that they needed support. Several clients reported having been let down by other organisations in the past, therefore affecting their capacity to trust services. Other clients reported that their military background and their pride precluded them from seeking support, as they were expected to be strong and resilient.

"I was not readily accepting people's help. I was weary because I have been let down. Coming out of the forces, you are more independent; you do for others. It is hard to accept that you have problems and hold your hand out for help" (Conor, m).

"I have been let down before by other agencies because of reshuffling; you are left hanging out in the precipice not knowing what to do" (Jenny, f).

"Before, I would not have asked for help. I look after myself; my partner and I look after ourselves... but then everything changed" (Peter, m).

"It was an embarrassment the first time I had to ask for help. But seAp gave me a voice. Someone was listening to me and offering the support that I was lacking. Before [mAs] I had no knowledge of this type of service. I find that, in our group, it's difficult to ask for help because if someone puts you down you shut down" (Paul, m).

In five cases, clients reported that their attitude to accessing support had remained the same after their involvement in the programme. This group of clients is divided between those whose attitude to accessing service has remained negative and those whose attitude has always been that services are there to be used when needed. Two interviewees noted that after their experience with the programme they were less inclined to ask for support in the future as mAs did not deliver the outcomes they expected.



Expectations of mAs Participation

In terms of expectations of the service, the majority of interviewees (18) reported having no expectations of the support offered by the Advocate prior to accessing the service, partly due to previous negative experiences of support, or having no experience accessing services in the past at all. However, for most, the support they received from their Advocate was better than they had anticipated and hoped for.

"I didn't have any expectations. I had no clue what they were all about until [Advocate] came into my life and starting working with me to sort everything out. He reassured me and within weeks things started moving. I had no idea what he could do. The programme has really helped me" (Joel, m).

"I didn't know what to expect when I phoned. I was amazed at how supportive the first point of contact was. She was so caring and put me at ease immediately. I didn't expect the services I was provided... They just put me at ease straight away" (Peter, m).

"I didn't have any expectations. I didn't know enough about the programme. But whatever I asked they always helped me. Sometimes you just need someone to talk to. We chat, we explore things, and they get delivered. They are very helpful" (Michael, m). A similar theme was found amongst those reporting low expectations of the service (5), but in addition to previous negative experiences, participants' low expectations were compounded by the severity of their situation and the numerous problems they were dealing with:

"When I first met [Advocate] my expectations were at an all-time low, nothing seemed to be working. I had so much going on" (Paul, m).

"I had quite low expectations. I wanted to move at the time, but I was also suffering from severe PTSD. I needed to make sure I was mentally right to move on, to have a clear focus mentally. I also have some ongoing legal and financial in the background as well. My wife was also diagnosed with PTSD, although she was not in the military" (Frank, m).

In contrast, two people reported having high expectations of the service and felt mAs did not deliver on those expectations. These participants explained that the crux of their problems were financial and mAs was not able to find the right sources to provide the money they needed. Moreover, one participant felt he needed a service that would do more things for him than occurred, feeling instead he was only provided information.

Experience of mAs

A majority of interviewees (18 out of 25) commented that the process of getting started with mAs and working with their Advocate was easy or straightforward, whilst three found the process very slow.

Although service users interviewed described having diverse needs, there was a high number of clients who received support with accessing appropriate care packages, financial support (e.g. benefits such as war pension, PIP, debt management), mental health support for diverse needs (PTSD, paranoia, anxiety, depression), mediation, social isolation, housing and family support. For most clients, the advocacy element of the programme in addition to the moral and practical support they received stand out as highlights from their experience of mAs.

"I see seAp as a more positive organisation.
[Advocate] listened to me, followed the process, and commented accordingly. She made no unreasonable promises. What we agreed on, she carried out. She had a clear, positive approach" (Karl, m).

"I found the programme very positive and encouraging. It was good support when I really despaired because I was not getting anywhere. Even though [Advocate] was experiencing frustration trying to communicate with the Council, at least I was bouncing it to him. This is very valuable for people when they need help. I found it really helpful. The practical support and listening to me when I was upset trying to negotiate with the Council" (Dot, f).

For a number of clients, receiving support with the Personal Independent Payment application process was a particularly positive feature of the service. Clients reported receiving support at different stages of the process, including the appeals process. Moreover, clients highlighted the importance of having an Advocate present at PIP meetings. Going through this process, clients emphasised the value of one-to-one support, and strong communication skills:

"[A highlight for me] was the efficiency of how things got done, how they helped me with PIP. This time, I didn't have to appeal because everything was done properly. I had home visits from [Advocate] to prepare me. He supported me with everything I was not sure about. He was spot on. Him being there at the meeting with me made a huge difference" (Joel, m).

"[During the PIP process], I was in contact with [Advocate] all the time. He helped us fill out the forms. We spent time going through the PIP form with him, and he went through the whole process and prepared me for the interview. He was present in the interview. He prompted me and helped me... It was amazing. As an Advocate, he really supported me" (Joel, m).

A number of clients mentioned that feeling that someone was 'fighting their corner', and 'giving them a voice' were highlights of their participation in the programme.

Tommy (m) engaged with mAs to address debt issues and deal with his finances. He also wished to improve his employment prospects.

"My confidence has changed. I felt that I was useless at the time, but after talking to [Advocate]... He got my confidence back up. He said I was worth something. He picked me up, all through conversations."

Moreover, some service users considered 'being listened to' an important aspect of the success of the service and credit it with the impact the programme has had on their lives. For this group of clients, the service focuses on what it is important to them, not what 'others' think is important for them:

"They help you with things that are important to you" (Nick, m).

"I felt I was able to speak to [Advocate] quite openly and he definitely tried his best to find a solution" (Harold, m). "Part of the service is making you feel comfortable. They value your opinion and think your needs are important regardless of what they are. There is no bias. I don't like to talk about my problems, but I was able to talk to them" (Nick, m).

Qualities of Service

Military Background

In terms of the Advocate's background, experience and expertise, for eight people, it was crucial the Advocate had a military background. These participants felt that having a military background facilitated communication and interactions, in addition to providing a safe space to acknowledge that they needed support:

"Yes, the fact that both Advocates were exmilitary helped a lot. We have been through similar situations. They experienced the transition [into civilian life]. It is important to hear how they went through it. It is like family, you feel close to someone, it breaks the ice. You are more willing to communicate your problems" (Conor, m).

"There is a language we all understand. There is also an unspoken word, but [as ex-military] you understand it without having to say it. Things catch up with you and it's good to have someone who understands what you are going through" (Ollie, m).

"It was helpful that he had a military background. At the end of the day there is no point if someone does not understand the military mind. I would shut down in interviews. I would say that I was grand when I wasn't really" (Norman, m). For ten interviewees, knowing the Advocate's experience, particularly in mental health, was most valuable. The majority of these clients expressed that they had waited a long time to access support which left them overwhelmed and in dire need of support.

Quentin (m) expressed "I was glad I was getting assistance. I was climbing the walls at that point. I am disabled... I was trying to deal with everything by myself." This particular client needed urgent help with PIP, and felt they couldn't cope alone. He had come out of service in 1999 and struggles with digital technology, as well as having some difficulties with writing.

"I don't think having a military background is 100% important. It helps with the understanding, but when I speak with other people in the group, they get a lot from being able to talk, being listened to, and being pointed in the right direction" (Norman, m).

"I know my Advocate had a nursing background in mental health, and as far as I am concerned he is a caring guy and has done an excellent job" (Frank, m).

Sectoral Expertise

Nine people highlighted that the Advocate's expertise in navigating certain processes (e.g. benefit acquisition) and the advocacy approach were attractive features of the service, and felt they were provided with adequate information and support.

Overall, interviewees, bar one, were satisfied with the Advocates' background, experience and expertise. One person felt their Advocate was not equipped to deliver the service he needed at the time.

"Yes, it was all very clear from the beginning, and also the process that we were going to go through [for PIP]. We had three interviews in our home. We had all the information and support we needed before, during and after the process" (Peter, m).

Robin (m) was grieving the loss of his wife alongside trying to deal with ongoing depression and housing and financial issues. "Yes, he made it clear. 'I am here to advise you and you take the steps. We will guide you every step of the way.' That was reassuring for me."

Advocate Professionalism

For a number of clients, the Advocates' demeanour was a key aspect of the positive experience they had using the service. Service users noted that Advocates' professionalism and compassion were fundamental in engaging with clients in difficult circumstances without being condescending: "I found the Advocate's demeanour very positive. He looks casual, wears normal shirt and trousers, always normalises the situation. He is approachable and friendly. Being so normal really helped, and yet offering such professional services. He interacted with everyone in my family. My children know him and trust him. He didn't judge us. He came in professionally and guided us with what we need to get done" (Betty, f).

"He was courteous, professional and he listened to me. At the time, I was very stressed out and confused. After the initial meeting, it was easy. We always achieved something; there were tangible results" (Leon, m).



Outcomes and Impact

In total, 18 (out of 25) clients reported that their attitude to accessing support had changed positively as a result of their participation in mAs. For some clients, the advocacy ethos of the organisation, the Advocates' professionalism, and tangible outcomes were key elements in shifting negative perceptions of accessing support services.

Ollie (m) described how, "Before seAp, I didn't know about advocacy. A lot of people don't understand advocacy. [Advocate] has shown me how important it is. If they were not around, there would be more people struggling." This client suffers with long-term mental health problems, suffered a breakdown and is unemployed, which has led to ongoing financial issues in addition.

Peter (m) stated "What was amazing to me was their professionalism. [Advocate] was incredibly professional. Every detail was taken into account, like a firm of solicitors. They helped me so much. They alleviated so much stress and anxiety." Peter suffered an assault and ended up in financial difficulty after job loss.

"I had no opinion before because I never had the need. Now I feel if someone is offering support, I would take it. [Advocate] showed me that it works" (Dot, f). Over half of participants (15) reported their lives had changed positively since they started working with the Advocate. For example, a number of service users reported that their confidence and self-esteem had increased as a result of being involved in the programme:

"My confidence has come back. My whole life has changed. I am more confident now. A few months ago, I would not have been able to talk to you. The main thing that is positive for me is the ability to conduct my own affairs. It has built my confidence in myself" (Robin, m).

Stan (m) described how "[Advocate] has inspired me, I suppose. She has given me confidence. I feel supported. She keeps on top of things. She wants to know the outcome of every step we take. She has given me ways to cope. She is interested. She has helped me out a lot. Being part of this has made me want to volunteer for them." Stan left the military in 2013 and was referred to mAs owing to issues with the police and a court case. He was feeling stuck and struggling with mental health issues.

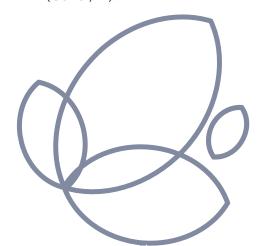


We were on the cusp of being homeless; it was horrific ... My main concern, my most pressing need, was housing. We were desperate for help and they just put me at ease straight away (Matthew, m).

Another important change reported by clients was the positive impact on their mental health. Although clients acknowledged that mental health issues are complex and take time to address, working with Advocates has alleviated some of the pressure and isolation that compound mental health issues:

"The service has helped me hugely. It has taken me from being suicidal to having the support of someone I trust, someone I can talk to" (Joel, m).

"The fact that each day you want to get out of bed without questioning what it's all for; it is possible for individuals to give up. Knowing that someone is out there making a difference, spending time on me. I am letting them and myself down if I give up. It has given me impetus to do something for myself" (Conor. m).





"I still struggle with mental health issues and feel isolated but, overall, all things considered, there has been an improvement in my quality of life" (Ollie, m).

Five clients spoken to reported that nothing had changed since working with the Advocate, for a number of reasons. Following his own judgement, one client said that he was not ready to move on. Other service users reported that their needs were beyond the programme's current capability to assist them.

"We did an initial approach to social services about some benefits. I was not in the right place mentally to approach them. It wasn't the Advocate's fault. I declined the help because I got a new job. We did look at the housing situation, but it was purely my own choice to leave it. I think the complexity and background of my mental health issues are extensive, and I will need some time to sort them out" (Frank, m).

Una (f) reported that, "On the one hand, we are still stuck in the same situation, but on the other hand, having seAp's support has been very good." The spouse of an ex-serviceman, Una suffers from mental and physical disabilities and is having ongoing housing problems.

For one client, being part of the programme has brought about negative impact as no positive outcomes had been achieved at the time of the interview. He believes this is as result of not having qualified Advocates to deliver the service in his area.

Additionality

When asked to compare mAs to other available support, clients felt that the mAs support was better than other support services they had accessed in the past for several reasons. Interviewees commented that the military focus of the service was helpful as it spoke the veterans' 'language' and understood their 'culture':

Harold (m) needed support whilst recovering from mental health issues, to deal with housing and financial problems. "I had a mental health breakdown and mental health issues before. It was good that seAp had a military feel to it. I felt they were more understanding."

Paul (m) described how "[The service] was amazing. The support, the camaraderie, the feeling of security speaking to them was unparalleled." They were assisted with pension issues and other support to get back on track, and felt supported through a lot of changes in their life.

Jenny (f), from a military family and suffering with severe PTSD, expressed how "mAs is different from other services. People I worked with before in other organisations were condescending. They put you in a box. They label you because of your mental health. With [Advocate], we communicate easily and often. She keeps her word. I feel stronger."

Karl (m) described how "We wanted a Military Advocate because they are familiar with how things work within the military, and are able to support veterans with systems outside the military." Alongside his brother, Karl, himself a military serviceman, disputed a care claim for his father, an ex-serviceman.

Moreover, a few clients highlighted that the mAs service delivery ethos made a difference in how they experienced the service, as clients felt treated as equals:

Leon (m) was struggling with health needs and going through an autism referral process. "[Advocate] was able to talk to me as an equal about things that are frustrating. They know the routine in the military. They swap jokes and stories... I was made feel valued and wanted, as one of the team, whereas in other organisations, I just felt unwanted, a nuisance to the system."

Michael (m), a 57 year old medically retired exserviceman, liked that "It is military based. It has a different sense of humour. They seem to understand more about us. They mean what they say; communication is easier. Having a military background helps to break the ice. We have something in common." This client has physical disabilities and uses a wheelchair. He was referred by an ambulance driver after having a fall.

Clients also perceived the assistance the programme provided as more straightforward and tangible when compared to other organisations. For example, a client described how the Advocate helped him resolve a situation he had been struggling to resolve for a long time with other organisations:

Norman (m) expressed that "The service was straightforward. [Advocate] explored options with me and guided me with what I needed to do. He made things happen. We got the ball rolling... There was actual progress." Suffering with PTSD and having recently lost his partner, Norman was struggling with taking on all financial responsibilities and experienced homelessness for a time.

Nonetheless, the advocacy service was not suitable for everyone. One client reported that he would have preferred more hands-on support from the Advocate, instead of only providing information and guidance.

Providing Feedback & Recommending the Service

12 (out of 25) clients reported having been given an opportunity to provide formal feedback through a written questionnaire following the closure of their case. A few clients noted that they had completed several questionnaires for each case mAs opened for them. On the other hand, just over half of the interviewees had not (or not yet) been given the opportunity to provide feedback at the time of the interview. A few of the clients in this group could not remember whether they had provided feedback. One client suggested the use of oral feedback to accommodate those who might have difficulties writing.

Ten interviewees noted that there were several aspects of the programme that could be improved across areas. More than half of these clients (7) believed the programme could benefit from increasing the number of staff, which in turn would bring about more one-to-one contact with clients. One client believed Advocates needed further training.

When discussing seAp's potential to maximise the future offering of the mAs service, 16 (out of 25) clients reiterated the importance of having adequate numbers of staff delivering the service. Clients noted the service was understaffed across areas. In addition, six service users believed the organisation could benefit from advertising their services more widely. A few interviewees believed that advocacy services should become statutory services endorsed and funded by government agencies, and advertised more to servicepeople before they leave service:

"The government need to get more involved and recognise how helpful [seAp] is... More resources need to be put into the programme" (Conor, m).

"I hope they continue to receive funding. I'd like to see this service funded through the government" (Karl, m).

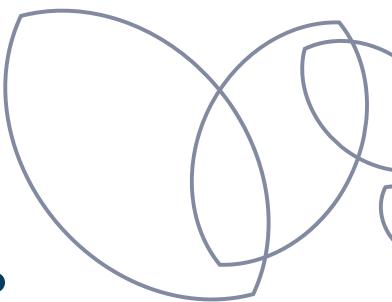
"I have been retired since 1998 and had never heard of them. Perhaps current Service personnel need to be made aware of seAp. More awareness is needed about the service. I found it quite by accident" (Leon, m). "They could advertise the service more to Service leavers. I keep saying people coming out of the forces need to know this service is available for them as soon as they come out" (Leon, m).

A small number of clients (2) reported that they had hesitations in recommending the service based on their negative experience of the programme. However, despite feeling as though they had experienced the programme adversely, they did not discount the possibility of recommending mAs, providing the programme addresses their current concerns.

23 (out of 25) clients said that they would recommend the service to other veterans, as they had a positive experience with an organisation they trust. This seemed particularly poignant for some as they acknowledged that veterans find it difficult to ask for help:

"Yes, because I had a positive experience. I know veterans find it hard to ask for help. If I knew someone who needed the service I would tell them what a positive experience it has been for me" (Paul, m)

"Yes! I would give it a 5-star review!" (Leon, m).



"Yes, absolutely! They have been here all the way with me. They made the process as painless as possible. Nothing has been too much trouble. Even the smallest questions get answered a thousand times if I forget and ask again. They have been outstanding" (Eddie, m).

For a number of clients, the military aspect of the service is the main reason why they would recommend the service:

"I would. I had friends who had killed themselves due to their conditions. I was on a mental health waiting list for a year. I count myself lucky. This is going to implode because you are going to start seeing people who served in Afghanistan; the ones who are still out there. I know people who have PTSD and they don't want to admit it. The thing is, once you get discharged, you are on your own" (Frank, m).

Others highlighted the support the programme offered their families was a key factor in recommending the service to other veterans or their relatives:

Vera (f), the wife of a veteran who suffers from severe PTSD, was happy to recommend the service. Facing housing issues and dealing with her own anxiety and depression, she felt everything was getting on top of her prior to engaging with mAs. "Yes, 100%! They help people through very tough times. I have met other wives who need support, and I think they would benefit from this service immensely."

"Absolutely! [Advocate] saved my life. He saved my family. It is difficult for soldiers to ask for help when you get low, but there are really tough times when you do need help and having a professional on your side is vital" (Betty, f).

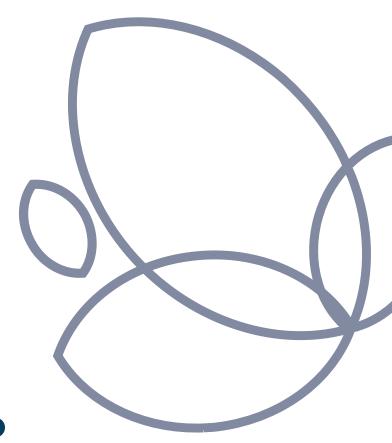
Finally, six interviewees and focus group participants commented on the programme's unique approach to assisting approach veterans' family members. For these clients, this was a lifeline when they felt their most vulnerable and isolated. Interviewed family members noted that when ex-service personnel leave the services, families are also affected by the transition:

"My husband has complex PTSD. I am not working; I am disabled. I was suffering with anxiety and depression. Everything was getting on top of me. I realised I could not do it on my own. Having [the Advocate] on my side has helped immensely, having someone there with me to support me" (Alice, f).

"When you leave the service, it is not just the husband who loses, it is the wives as well. They lose their community, their circle" (Fran, f).

"[The Advocate] came in thinking it was only me who needed help, but it was everybody, he engaged with my entire family" (Julie, f).

"[I hope mAs] continues to support people who are vulnerable, because I didn't know about them, and we are a small family and have a small support system to bounce ideas off each other. When [the Advocate] came, he was a really huge help and support, very helpful" (Julie, f).



5. Advocate Perspective

The interviews with 11 of mAs' Advocates explored their understanding and experience of the Advocate role, as well as their views on mAs, and the perceived impact it has on clients. This section summarises their responses, and has been broken down by key themes.

The Role of the Advocate

During the interviews, Advocates spoke about the main aims and objectives of mAs, and what they felt had prompted a need for the service. Advocates discussed how the service assists veterans with adjusting to civilian live and supports them and their families with issues by ensuring that their voice is heard. Advocates discussed how advocacy involves empowering the individual to be able to make their own decisions, as well as providing them with information and signposting to services or help that the veterans require.

"We support clients to make informed choices."

"The service identifies things that people need to improve their situation, and helps them to work out they can access the services and the help that they need. It aims to give them a voice to speak up about what they want to achieve."

Navigating the 'systems' such as applying for financial support or benefits, or applying for housing, and accessing support for mental health issues were the main areas of support Advocates provide to the clients.

Advocates recognised a need for advocacy for veterans due to their previous service experiences, including not having to locate or access services themselves because if there was something they needed it was provided immediately, as well as issues they had as a result of what they may have witnessed during their service.

"After years of being told what to do and how to do it, and not ever questioning anything, I don't think the massive impact of actually leaving (service) sinks in until quite a few people find themselves in hot water. They don't know what's there, they don't know what's available, they don't know how to ask for it, they don't know that they need to ask for it..."

Several of the Advocates also talked about the networking involved in the role, including making other organisations (both statutory and nonstatutory) aware of mAs and how they can make referrals to the service, as well as joint working with other organisations, and attending local meetings.

Service Delivery

Encouraging the Use of mAs

Networking with other organisations to raise awareness of mAs was perceived to be the most effective way of encouraging veterans to use the service and get referrals. A number of the referrals received by mAs originate from other military support organisations. Advocates talked about the many ways in which they have engaged with stakeholders in the sector and promoted the service, including attending local military support meetings, having 1-to-1 meetings with other organisations, distributing leaflets and other forms of promotional materials to local groups, promoting mAs on the radio, delivering training sessions, and attending events aimed at the military community.

"In my role, networking is essential. We haven't had much of a network in [location] before. We've been going to lots of meetings to explain what seAp does, and provide detailed information. We go to events aimed at veterans. I am going to the NHS to give a presentation on advocates and what we do and what we provide."

Working with Clients

As mentioned, mAs clients present with a range of issues they need support with, some of the main ones being financial support such as applying for benefits or pensions they are entitled to, mental health issues, and support with housing issues. Advocates support in varied ways from providing information, attending meetings with the clients, or supporting with form-filling. Although Advocates generally felt well prepared when dealing with clients, they identified a small number of challenges. Such challenges included dealing with veterans who find it difficult to ask for help or support or are too 'proud', managing clients expectations in terms of the support mAs can provide, or uncovering the main issue in what seems like a web of concerns or problems. Advocates did, however, highlight a number of techniques they used, firstly to encourage veterans to use the service, and secondly to establish effective working relationships with their clients, as outlined in the following section.

Key Elements of the Service Developing Effective Working Relationships

In terms of encouraging veterans to actually access mAs once they are aware of it, Advocates indicated there are a number of key approaches they used in order to do this:

Be Approachable and Build Trust

Firstly, Advocates emphasised the importance of being approachable and available to take time to talk to the client and get to know their situation. Meeting face-to-face was viewed as the most effective way to build a rapport and trust with a client. In addition, being flexible and adaptable when meeting clients' needs was seen to be an important way to build effective working relationships with clients.

"Being adaptable and confident is essential in this job. Being adaptable to clients' needs, making sure that they get what they want, not what you want... I generally don't use coffee houses to meet clients... I meet them wherever they feel comfortable."

Set Boundaries

Setting and maintaining professional boundaries was highlighted by Advocates as key to their role, and the ability to build working relationships with clients. Advocates emphasised the importance of setting boundaries and explaining to clients what they can and cannot do for them at the outset of the support.



"I set boundaries from the beginning, being clear on what we do and we don't do... It takes time to develop a relationship with the client. Sometimes it could be a quick process, but most of the clients are nervous and need time to develop trust and confidence in the programme."

Use Clear Communication and Language

The use of clear communication and appropriate language was identified as crucial to developing working relationships with the clients and working through the issues they present with successfully. Effective communication was also deemed to be important when gaining and building trust with a client, in order to ensure they are aware and updated on what is happening with their case. "The main thing is to keep them updated with progress so they know where they stand. That keeps a line of communication open as well and they know where you are as part of your investigations you are doing for them."

Military Background

Several Advocates talked about how a personal military background or experience of living with someone in the military was a pivotal part of their ability to work effectively with clients. Advocates felt a personal understanding of the military and some of the issues clients may present with helped immensely in building a trusting relationship with the client, and encouraging the client to open up about their issues.



"The best approach (to building effective working relationships) would be the squaddie mentality. If you talk the same language as a service person and use acronyms and formal banter they relate to you because you speak their language."

What Worked Well

During the interviews, Advocates highlighted a number of areas of mAs delivery they felt had worked particularly well in their areas. The most commonly reported aspects included: networking with other organisations, the level of support provided by Advocates, the delivery of support (face-to-face, one-to-one), and the Advocate knowledge.

Networking and Promotion

Advocates reported that they felt within the last year the profiling and promotion of mAs amongst stakeholders has gone particularly well.

"We go there (local veterans meeting) regularly. It is working well in terms of networking. It has a ripple effect; once people start to know what you do, the word spreads."

"I feel the profiling and development of the service has worked well. seAp and mAs' names have become more widely known, and people are more aware of the services we offer."

Support

Having the time and ability to provide in-depth one-to-one support was acknowledged as an area of the service which Advocates felt had been working well. Advocates commented that the amount of support they are able to give each individual client helped the individual to work through their issues, build trust in one person and in most cases get the desired outcome.

"There is more benefit from one-to-one meetings. If I encourage someone to go to a group, I also go so they recognise a friendly face. That's something I do. I know how difficult it was for me to go out and meet new people."

Advocates' Knowledge

Advocates reported that their knowledge of the systems and how they work, as well as any specialist knowledge they may have gained from previous experience, were central to working through issues with clients.



"Awareness of the systems and how to challenge them, or how to make clients feel they are able to challenge, and giving them the voice has worked well."

Challenges & Barriers to Service Delivery

Advocates discussed areas in which they had experienced challenges or barriers during their delivery of mAs (outside of those already discussed when dealing with clients). The most commonly discussed challenges or barriers included defining the role of the Advocate, both to external organisations and to clients; keeping up to date with knowledge and awareness of the systems they deal with as advocates; and providing financial assistance to clients.

Defining the Advocate Role

Although Advocates generally felt that networking and the promotion of mAs had improved the external knowledge and awareness of mAs, some felt that there can still be a misunderstanding of what mAs offers amongst both external organisations and clients. For example, Advocates had been approached with cases involving legal matters that were too detailed/ high-level for them to deal with, when an external organisation had misunderstood the meaning of advocacy.

Keeping Up to Date with Knowledge

Advocates highlighted that although they have some knowledge of the different systems they support the veterans to navigate, such as the benefit system, it was a challenge for them to keep up to date and know everything. Some felt that the initial induction training could provide further information and support on understanding the systems.

Provision of Financial Assistance to Clients

Advocates mentioned that the inability to provide grants to clients, as other larger organisations are able to, can cause issues in dealing with cases in a timely manner. Although they are able to refer to larger organisations, these organisations are often held back by a time delay of around 12 weeks before they are able to help with the issue, causing further stress for the client.

Data Monitoring & Feedback Systems Data Monitoring

During the interviews, Advocates discussed how effective they felt the data monitoring systems are. Views were mixed. Two Advocates noted that the system is comprehensive, covering all aspects they felt should be covered. In addition, one Advocate commented that as well as recording robust data for monitoring purposes, the system is also useful in the instance of an Advocate taking over cases from an Advocate that has left the position.

A further two Advocates indicated that the data monitoring systems, such as the CRM, have improved over time, with recent changes making it "less clunky" and more robust.

"The system itself is fairly geared up for the service that we operate. It has had some recent tweaks as some information was not being captured before that was needed for the evaluation."

In contrast, four Advocates felt that the systems require the user to record an excessive amount of information, and is therefore time consuming for the user. Furthermore, three Advocates commented that the systems are a challenge to get used to, although acknowledged that a record of the information is needed for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

"I find it very difficult to navigate at times. It's a bit clumsy. It's not intuitive... It provides a useful service but is a bit clunky to use."

Two Advocates mentioned the training they had received for the systems, and acknowledged that this was helpful as a starting point in navigating the CRM system.

Feedback from Clients

Advocates talked about how they obtain feedback from clients. The majority of Advocates discussed the questionnaire and impact scales they complete with clients at the beginning and end of a case. Although Advocates acknowledged that the impact scales are useful in terms of measuring wellbeing and improvement, some questioned their appropriateness for the client group, and indicated that they can be a confusing tool for clients, with a number of clients presuming they are about the issues they would like support with rather than how they are feeling.

"I don't think the impact scale is fit for purpose. We get mixed messages from managers on what the impact scale is supposed to mean. The impact scale is about the issue rather than the service. Clients don't understand it. It is too broad; not focused enough... Clients feel it is about the issue, not about how they feel."

"I wonder if we could capture how people are dealing with their issues at the start, then half way, and then at the end. That might be a better way to get feedback on the impact instead of asking about mental health all the time. A lot of people don't want to be reminded that they have mental health issues."

Advocates also referred to a feedback survey that clients can complete, although commented that this is administered centrally rather than through the Advocate. In addition, Advocates talked about receiving feedback more informally, which was generally verbal.

mAs Management Structures & Shared Learning

The interviews explored the Advocates' views on the effectiveness of mAs' management structures, including whether they feel supported in their role. The majority of advocates indicated that they felt supported, emphasising that although they are not located in the same place, the management team are "always at the end of the phone" to provide advice and support if needed. Advocates were particularly positive about the introduction of a Supervising Advocate and the support they provide.

A couple of the advocates indicated that they did not feel fully supported by the management structure in place, suggesting that they had not had much interaction with the management, or that the initial induction and training could be improved in order to make them feel more supported and less isolated. However, it was also noted that recent changes in the structure had improved the level of support and the ability to approach the management. Changes to the induction and training process have now been implemented.



Sharing Learning

Advocates discussed how they shared learning with each other and more widely across the seAp organisation. Given the locations of and distances between the Advocates, the various mechanisms used for sharing information and learning were generally perceived to be of high importance and beneficial to the Advocates. Advocates felt that the quarterly meetings held in London with the wider mAs team were a useful way to share experiences and discuss service delivery. Advocates also commented that meeting face-to-face for these meetings enabled them to feel part of a team, as well as share client stories and get an understanding of what others are doing. In addition, peer support meetings, whereby Advocates meet once a month via Skype, were viewed as invaluable. Peer support meetings were perceived to be a useful opportunity to share and discuss issues with other advocates, and talk through any areas they wish to raise at the quarterly focus group.

"The focus group meeting was really helpful and beneficial. A way to share experiences, pass on achievements, share client stories and get an idea of what everyone else is doing. It is a really good way to share."

"We have a peer support group to discuss issues once a month. It is a sounding board; you have that element of support and knowledge between the different areas."

The meetings and other mechanisms for sharing information were generally perceived very positively amongst Advocates. However, it was noted by a minority that they are less aware of what is happening within the team regarding management level operations, and further information on this may be useful.

Impact on Clients

Advocates discussed how the support provided had impacted on the clients. The positive outcomes of the support resonated during all the Advocate interviews and Advocates provided examples of how clients had benefitted, from gaining practical support with issues such as financial support they are entitled to, applying for mobility support, and help with formfilling, to receiving professional psychological help for mental health issues they presented with.

"It is extremely positive.
The programme is making them aware of the services that are available, and supports them along the way. Clients start to feel that they are not alone and they have someone they can trust to support them."

In addition, Advocates discussed how mAs support informs clients about what is available to them and how they can navigate the systems to receive what they are entitled to, as well as providing them with practical information on what veterans groups and other organisations are available to them.

Advocates also alluded to the social benefits clients have experienced through engaging with mAs. Meeting other veterans, and other people in general, has built confidence for some clients, and made them feel part of a community again since leaving the military. In addition, Advocates felt that clients may learn to build trust again after working with an Advocate and receiving support from mAs.

"A benefit to the client is making friends with likeminded people. There is a common goal to speak freely and openly about trauma and past experience (with one another). Swapping information on how they go to such and such... (following mAs support); they are doing it independently they don't always need the Advocate there."

Addressing Needs

It was generally felt that the support delivered by mAs was addressing the needs of the veterans engaging with the service. However, it was also recognised that there are some aspects that mAs is unable to help with (e.g. complex legal expertise and advice), and Advocates agreed it was important to set out and manage expectations at the beginning of the support.

"Talking to my colleagues, I hear the majority of clients say that they are happy with the services they receive. Of course, there are things we cannot do and it is important to have that understanding from the beginning."

mAs & the Wider Support Sector

Advocates highlighted a number of gaps and challenges when operating within the wider veteran support sector. Some Advocates felt that there are gaps in the support sector for veterans, namely support for mental health issues and the availability of longer-term or more in-depth support of the sort mAs offers, which was noted as a particular gap in areas where mAs does not operate. In addition, some Advocates felt that there is a lack of awareness of seAp and mAs amongst the veteran community and other organisations supporting veterans. Furthermore, it was suggested that there is also a lack of awareness from veterans of what support is available more generally. Advocates felt that there is often a lack of understanding of the sector from veterans and that this is often due to the fact that there are a lot of support organisations within the arena, and veterans have little understanding or clarity on what they do or how they can support.

Advocates discussed how support is often duplicated within the sector, with veterans organisations overlapping in the support they provide, often caused by a lack of coherency, collaboration and coordination between different agencies.

"Instead of looking at being more collegiate or collaborative they (support organisations) often bring their own issues, values and wants to the table." Advocates highlighted the need for effective networking in order to overcome these challenges and to be able to work together more effectively. Advocates did feel, however, that mAs is having a wider impact on the veterans sector in that it is working to increase the integration and coordination of support for veterans, and that it complements other projects and programmes in its service delivery areas.

"Services are well integrated in our area. It feels sometimes as though everyone knows everyone. I feel I am part of something that is strengthening integration and promoting social inclusion in general."

"I think we complement well. I have been working hand-in-hand with SSAFA on 2 cases. We pretty much have done everything together. If there is need for money they take care of it, and we sit in with NHS agencies, attend meetings with clients and network with other organisations."

"It is very mutually beneficial because some of the issues they cannot deal with they pass the clients on to us [e.g. time-intensive benefits appeals], and vice versa. Some of the things that we cannot help with, we pass on to them. There is mutual benefit. There is a close bond. This partnership also benefits clients."

One Advocate felt that although there is a desire at ground level to work together and coordinate services, it could be improved at a higher level. "There is an appetite on the ground but that is not replicated at the more managerial level."

Added Value

Advocates provided their views on the additionality of mAs, and talked about how they felt the service is different to other available services. Added value included the face-to-face element of the support, and that Advocates guide clients through issues, decisions and support rather than prescribing support or advising on what they should do. Advocates also mentioned the immediacy of mAs support, and the fact there is no waiting time for clients like there is in other services. The holistic approach of the service and the ability to cover several issues with a client were also mentioned as differences between this service and other available support.

"I don't advise in regards to which direction they (clients) should be taking. I leave it to the client to make the decision. I explain potential outcomes and so they have more of an insight into the decisions they wish to make, and then I support those decisions as far as I can."

"mAs is very direct. No waiting list or time. We can have a face-to-face interview there and then, or we can find out if we can help them or not. So it is instantaneous."

Several Advocates discussed the importance of building trust with the clients they are assisting, and taking the time to do this, in contrast to other support that is often time-limited. "We aim to build relationships based on mutual respect without ignoring boundaries. It is important to have time to share with clients. Just being there, being able to talk about other things... that helps to tease out actual issues."

"A lot of them (other organisations)... they can offer what we call a sticking tape solution. They put a plaster on something that needs maybe major surgery, whereas we tend to be able to support them long term."

Personal Learning Points Learning Points for Advocates

During the interviews, Advocates discussed any learning they felt had been generated over the course of their involvement with the service. Advocates talked about a number of key learning points they had experienced through working for mAs, including: the ability to be non-judgemental; gaining an understanding of the systems and areas for which they assist clients, such as the benefits system; understanding the wider charitable support sector for veterans; learning how to effectively manage expectations; recognising the need for early intervention with veterans; and understanding about social isolation.

Impact on Advocates

Advocates discussed how their role with mAs had had an impact on them personally. Impact was felt in various ways, including: the role had increased their awareness of the issues faced by veterans and the scale of the problem; Advocates had developed connections and been exposed to a variety of people and ways of working; Advocates had made changes in the way they respond to people and issues, or how they view circumstances; and Advocates have found the experience of delivering mAs rewarding and fulfilling.

Improvements

Finally, Advocates talked about how they might do things differently if they were to start service delivery again from the beginning, and anything they would change to maximise the future impact of mAs.

Potential Changes

Advocates commented that if they were to start out service delivery again from the beginning, there would be four main areas in which they would make improvements. The most commonly reported area of change was the amount of Advocate time available for each area in which mAs operates, and in particular more Advocate time on the ground rather than completing administrative duties. Advocates felt that the part time posts should be for more hours in order to be able to work with clients, but also allow time for networking to build up the client base. Secondly, Advocates suggested that they would improve the induction process for new Advocates. It was felt that the induction should be a more formal process and involve more initial training, particularly on the monitoring systems.

Advocates also felt that there could be improvements in balancing the workload of the Advocate role, in terms of assigning an appropriate amount of time to working with clients and then time for networking. Currently, as the role develops, the line between client time and networking time appears to be slightly vague, so a more structured approach to this could be beneficial.

In addition, it was suggested that the mechanisms for recording information could be improved. One Advocate felt a more succinct way of collecting and storing information, such as transcribing devices, would be beneficial.



Maximising Future Impact

When discussing how to maximise the future impact of mAs, Advocates' comments fell into three main areas: awareness raising, geographical boundaries of the support, and funding.

Advocates felt that there is a lack of publicity and advertising present for the service, from general publicity in the community to specific information within the military sector. Suggestions for improving publicity and raising awareness included approaching the NHS to be advertised within their organisation; rebranding the service to make it stand out (which we know is an ongoing effort); and approaching serving military organisations to be present (or have information available) at exit interviews whereby staff are leaving the military.

"If we could (be present at the exit interview of military personnel) and become the main go to, we could then signpost to the relevant places and help advocate during the many processes. That would stop people getting into the financial crisis that they are finding themselves in."

Advocates also felt that seAp could reconsider and expand the geographical areas in which mAs operates in order to maximise the future impact of the service. The limitation of geographical areas has caused challenges or barriers for some advocates. Being unable to support a potential client because they are located out of the service area has been a frustration in some instances.

Advocates also felt that since the programme is due to end its current funding cycle in 2020, the programme should be looking for ways to gain further funding. It was suggested that seAp could look at local area funding, as well as more big players nationally, and work around this is ongoing.

6. Delivery Team Input

In addition to interviewing clients and Advocates, this wave of the evaluation explored the views held by key members of the seAp management team that are heavily involved with mAs and its ambitions. Telephone interviews were conducted with five strategically important members of staff, and a summary of some of their views is presented below.

Articulating the Ethos of mAs

Staff interviewed outlined a number of reasons why working for the organisation held appeal for them. Being involved with an organisation which was focussed on "empowering people" and helping vulnerable people to "look after themselves" and "build independence" were described as important. One participant described the organisation as being "driven by its values and by the contribution it makes to society." The perceived additionality offered by mAs was expressed via its focus on being clientled; having broader qualifying criteria; engaging people who would not otherwise be engaged by the support sector; and building capability in the people it assists.

"The role was appealing in terms of being able to help vulnerable people, to guide them in identifying the rights they have; in general the ethics of the organisation."

Staff described how they perceived the core ethos of mAs; they felt it had a focus on helping those who are struggling to adjust to civilian life; and a willingness to be open and to recognize that people who need help sometimes have "messy" lives, necessitating a flexible approach. mAs was described as reacting to that fact – that people's lives can be complicated. The need to acquire clients' trust, and to ensure clarity around their understanding of both the mAs offering and the ways in which the unique approach it adopts can help were described as important.

The need to have a clear narrative about the mAs offering and the meaning of advocacy more widely, and to convey how it is different from advice and support, was articulated, with one respondent offering the following definition of advocacy:

"We define advocacy as helping people to understand their choices and helping them to articulate their choices."

"Other organisations are starting to understand advocacy. They're starting to value what we do. We are getting the message out there, both at a senior level and on the ground."

They also outlined what signaled a need for mAs' existence in the sector.

"Evidence suggests that veterans find it difficult, post service, to access the services/ benefits they are entitled to; mAs is a service that allows those individuals to find their voice... Our service targets a system failure by helping veterans articulate their needs outside statutory support."

Interviewees articulated what they felt makes mAs different and sets it apart from other support services, describing how it does not provide handouts, and is "all about advocacy", as well as, they felt, being more user-led and having a less directive culture than other charities in the sector.



"This is about saying to people who are having a difficult time that we are helping them work through some of these issues. Helps you get back on your own two feet. We are going to help you find your own voice. That's the critical thing about advocacy; it is about enabling people to help themselves. This is the main difference from other legitimate social services available."

It was also acknowledged by the delivery team that they felt there is real value "in practitioners being people who have experience of what our clients are going through", and this peer-to-peer element of the service was described as something which sets the service apart.

"Because Advocates are ex-service people themselves, they have the same culture and language, and are able to help people to overcome barriers."



Developing Management Structures

mAs has had some staff turnover, something which some attribute to isolation experienced by Advocates working alone. However, changes have been implemented to ensure that is no longer the case going forward, and staff spoke positively of the role of the Advocate and their recruitment to this type of post, which one respondent described as a "job that people genuinely want to do." There has been a heightened focus on implementing a crossteam approach and a matrix management solution, promoting enhanced supervision in order to ensure the smooth running of the service and support staff more fully in their organizational roles. Induction and probation procedures have been tightened up, with enhanced training and KPIs now a feature in addition.

"We now have a Head of Service based in Plymouth. We injected the supervisory role in Plymouth; someone who supervises all mAs Advocates, where previously there was a weakness in the joining of them as a group across our geography. I think that has been solved by creating the Supervising Advocate role."

There is also an understanding amongst the delivery team that a voluntary sector organisation where data monitoring, evaluation, clearly defined remits and boundaries are key, can stand in cultural opposition with the military background of Advocates coming to work in that environment.

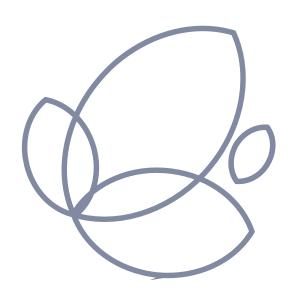
The subject of volunteering was noted as a service challenge, with difficulties identified in getting this to a desired level operationally.

"We had hoped to have a much bigger volunteer base, but managing volunteers at the same time as delivering a service is challenging... Recruiting and working with volunteers has not been as successful as we had hoped."

Future Operations

As with Advocates, the delivery team expressed a desire to do more preventative work, advertising their offering at an earlier stage with people who are at the point of leaving the Armed Forces, and putting measures in place to avoid service leavers reaching such low points before having to seek out support and engage with the service when already in crisis. It was felt this could be a longer-term objective for the service.

"As a general point on advocacy, it is a great means of cost-effective social care policy in a way that is not old-fashioned hand-out. This is about getting people to stand on their own two feet. I think that value, that powerful story, has not been made known in the sector, or generally. I am hoping this is an opportunity to make that case more powerfully."





7. Wider Stakeholder View

The majority of the 22 stakeholders interviewed to date work for national armed forces charities, including Help for Heroes, The Royal British Legion, SSAFA, and TILS. However, interviews were also conducted with stakeholders from other external organisations that interact with mAs, including mental health charities, drug and alcohol charities, and Plymouth City Council. Whilst most of the stakeholders work in frontline support roles, such as caseworkers, outreach workers, and nurses, a small number work in managerial or strategic roles within these organisations.

The interviews explored stakeholders' understanding and experiences of mAs, as well as their views on the impact it has on clients, and how the service could potentially be improved. Their responses are summarised below, broken down by key emergent themes.

Meeting the Needs of Veterans

The support offered to military veterans by these organisations was wide ranging, with many organisations offering support in multiple areas, and signposting to other organisations where they were unable to provide support. Some organisations provide support to veterans' family members, either exclusively or in addition to supporting veterans. The various organisations provide support with mental health, physical disabilities, drug and alcohol use, debt and finances, employment, benefits, housing, and homelessness. Whilst the support required by veterans varied with each organisation, half of all interviewees highlighted that mental health problems were common among service users.

Respondents discussed several challenges in meeting the needs of military veterans, the most common of which was managing veterans' expectations and understanding of what their organisation is able to provide:

"Our struggle is to be able to meet needs and whether we should be meeting their needs. The perception is we will do everything; sometimes expectation is the hardest thing to manage."

Closely linked to this was the challenge of finding the time and capacity to provide the degree of support required by some veterans with more complex needs:

"The biggest challenge really is finding the time to attend tribunals basically. It's obviously manpower intensive to take a couple hours out of the day to attend a court case."

"Time and intensity of support is a challenge for us."



"Challenges can be things like when you've got somebody that really is quite complex, I guess it is that advocacy bit they need the support with. That can be a challenge if they need that extra hand holding support that can be the difficulty. Say that they need to go to a PIP assessment, we don't necessarily do that but they do need that support."

Getting military veterans to engage with and trust organisations was also highlighted as a challenge, particularly for those with more complex issues, including mental health and drug and alcohol problems.

"Getting them to engage really. If it's mental health, it's a bit of a long winded process so you might try and plant the seed with someone and then mention it again a couple of weeks later, after they've had an opportunity to think about it. Obviously when people are dealing with mental health it's quite daunting and they think they're opening the box that might not want to open."

"Sometimes it's difficult to get people to engage. Although they really want to, they've just got some mental block."

Wider Support for Military Veterans

Stakeholders were asked how well they thought the support sector catered to ex-service personnel and their responses were mixed. Whilst the majority felt that there is a lot of support available for military veterans, most respondents also agreed that there is a lack of awareness among veterans of what support is available to them due to insufficient communication and promotion of services. Several interviewees also highlighted that it can be difficult for veterans to understand what support they can access due to varying and sometimes complex eligibility criteria:

"Lot of services out there provide support. One of the biggest obstacles is the individual knowing about these services. If you speak with veterans, they might not know about particular services such as ours and mAs. Getting the message out there to the veteran community, explaining that there are services out there is the biggest problem."

"There's a lot of support out there and we're quite lucky in the organisation I work with in that we're able to offer financial support, in terms of we can make grants and that kind of thing. It's just obviously whether the veterans are aware of the amount of support that's out there."

Those respondents who thought that the sector does not cater well to veterans highlighted gaps in the support available with regards to mental health and housing. Several also felt there is insufficient communication between organisations that provide support for military veterans, and the need for a more cohesive approach to be able to better support veterans.

"I think one of the main areas where they are let down is organisations not talking to each other and not sharing with their clients that other organisations could do a better job. And organisations not realising or wanting to admit what their boundaries are. They all try to take ownership of their client, but actually sometimes that organisation might not be the most appropriate to be dealing with it."

Stakeholders were asked what a military advocacy service could offer military veterans. They discussed it as being able to provide veterans with additional support to address problems that they have either tried to manage themselves unsuccessfully or feel unable to manage:

"Lots have been trying to get help for years and are at breaking point. To be able to pass that onto somebody and get that practical support makes a huge difference for them."

Stakeholders also felt that military advocacy could provide veterans with a voice when they are unable to represent themselves, empower them to take control of decisions, and build their confidence:

"There is something really unique in advocacy in that is has that empowering approach. In essence it is about trying to support the person to find their own solutions."

Some respondents also highlighted the support that military advocacy can provide in helping veterans to transition back into civilian life:

"Some people come out of service and struggle to engage with society...and the challenges of transition...So there is room for assistance for some veterans who may struggle to get right level of service."

"Support with benefits and housing and integrating back into civilian life. Having someone to talk to, have some understanding of what it is like to leave the forces and go back into civilian life."



The Purpose of mAs

Stakeholders were asked to discuss what they believed to be the main aims and objectives of mAs. Stakeholders described mAs as being an advocacy service which provides military veterans and their families with information and guidance to access the support and services they need. Providing veterans with a voice to be heard and empowering them to help themselves was also viewed as central to the purpose of mAs:

"Having somewhere where people can go who need support around accessing services or representation or confidence building to enable them to access the services they need."

"Basically just to give a veteran another voice and support with any issues they're facing but making sure that the veteran remains in charge rather than them rescuing them."

"Giving a voice to people that have been disenfranchised, to those that feel they are not being heard or need extra support. Support with issues around things like housing, social care, military charities linking in."

The support that stakeholders felt could be provided ranged from straightforward signposting to providing more intensive support to navigate complex systems and processes. Key areas in which stakeholders felt mAs could help were with benefits, particularly the Personal Independence Payment, housing, healthcare, and associated complaints and appeals:

"It would be help with benefits, assisting people to go and do something they might not feel able to do, representing them with Councils if an appeal has to be made, working with the DWP, that kind of thing."

Two interviewees felt that the aims and objectives of mAs are not well communicated.

Relationship with mAs

The majority of stakeholders had referred veterans to mAs and felt that they have an effective working relationship with the organisation. For many, this was supported by either pre-existing working relationships with Advocates or regular communication and feedback.

Many respondents also felt that mAs' offering was complementary to or built upon the support that their own organisation offers veterans, with referrals being a two-way process in many instances:

"We have had many meetings and a good working relationship... I do the work in hospital and then after that [Advocate] supports them. He is a fountain of knowledge."

"A very effective working relationship. We have goto people we can contact immediately, can offer immediate and practical support for our members who are struggling and we can't do anything about it."

"What tends to happen is that they've picked up a referral and they've brought the people to us for the support because obviously in terms of that financial support that's something we've been able to offer that they haven't been able to."

The majority of stakeholders referred clients to mAs either via telephone or email, with the minority using a referral form or providing clients with information to self-refer. In line with their views as to the purpose of mAs, stakeholders primarily referred veterans who need information and guidance on a variety of more complex issues and support with accessing services. This included benefit claims, appeals and tribunals. One respondent felt that working with mAs has limited effect:

"Quite a few people feel they get initial support but then don't hear anything. They have to chase for follow-ups which adds stress to what can already be a stressful situation."

There were few suggestions for ways to improve the working relationship with mAs, with the majority of stakeholders satisfied with it as it is. However, suggestions for improvement did include clarifying the role of Advocates and the support they can offer, and being able to refer clients directly to Advocates. One respondent felt it would be beneficial to ensure Advocates have access to 'FormA Casework Manager', software used by many military charities to facilitate information sharing and prevent duplication of work.

Effectiveness of mAs

Almost all respondents felt that mAs was effective, with all of them having experienced positive outcomes for clients:

"In reviewing case files, it was really clear that the service is having an impact and making a difference to the individuals."

"There's been some good outcomes which I know of. There's people with PTSD who have had it for a long time. Advocacy helped them to get to the right services, to get assessed, to be diagnosed."

"From the feedback we get, they wouldn't know where they would be without that support. For some it has saved their lives, because they have been so depressed, and thoughts of suicide, and they didn't have any support at all. So I think it has been really impactful on individuals' wellbeing."

"Most people have given feedback and said it has been a really helpful and valuable service; seAp has never come back and said they couldn't help or wouldn't help."

Some stakeholders felt unable to comment on how effective mAs is, and its impact on clients due to either a lack of feedback from clients or because their role does not interact with mAs clients. Only one respondent felt the service was ineffective, having witnessed limited numbers of positive outcomes for clients.

Specific Contribution and Additionality of mAs

The Role of mAs

The vast majority of stakeholders felt that mAs has an important role in the support service network for ex-service personnel. Those that did not concur felt either unable to comment or that it has the potential to in the future but is currently too small to make a significant impact on the support service network.

Stakeholders felt that the importance of mAs was a result of the knowledge of mAs and its Advocates, and thus their ability to inform veterans of their entitlements and available support:

"Having that knowledgeable friendly face in the community that I know I can rely upon, and someone who has got a lot of knowledge and has worked with a lot of different military charities, as [Advocate] has done, makes a massive difference. So I have confidence that they are offering a fantastic service and advice to our service users."

"mAs allows our volunteers, who are often bogged down trying to find out the answers themselves, it allows us [our organisation/ our volunteers] to free ourselves up and help in other ways."

Interviewees also felt that mAs is important for the sector due to its ability to be more flexible and responsive to clients' needs, compared to larger organisations which are more limited in their remit, and their ability to provide more intensive support:

"Yes, there's a need for it. Some of the services out there, the bigger ones, they're more formal, they're more structured. A smaller advocacy service can be more flexible."

"I do think it's become important. Like I've said, there have certainly been cases that I've had with complex people that if they hadn't have had that support they might have disengaged, and then we wouldn't have been any further forward."

Several respondents also felt mAs was important due to its focus on empowering veterans and providing them with a voice they may not otherwise have:

"I love the idea that the person stays in charge of it. You're suggesting avenues rather than saying well you're going to go down this one and do this. You're giving that person the confidence to say 'Well I'm going to do this...' So I'm all for giving the person a voice rather than the rescue."

The Additionality of mAs

Stakeholders were asked to discuss the additionality mAs brings to the support sector for veterans. Stakeholders felt that Advocates' increased time and capacity to provide clients with more intensive, one-to-one support in a wide range of areas differentiates mAs from other organisations in the sector. It was also recognised that advocacy in general is relatively uncommon and this in itself is a benefit of mAs:

"Advocacy services in general are pretty limited nowadays. The fact we have this service in Plymouth is fairly random, and having that service is quite important. If we didn't have it, there would be a huge vacuum in terms of that particular support." "There's a limit to what I can do for people sometimes because I've got lots of different cases to deal with. So the idea of me turning up one day and taking them along to an appeal or an assessment or to the job centre, I might be able to do that once or twice but I couldn't do that ongoing; it just wouldn't be realistic, but they can."

Stakeholders also felt that Advocates' military backgrounds also added to what mAs can offer clients, enabling them to build better rapport and trust with clients and thus provide better and more beneficial support:

"Cultural understanding, other advocacy services don't get it... I think a lot of the time if you have someone in post who has served then they have that mindset and understanding. That can be different in other advocacy services. mAs has that inherent knowledge."

Sustaining and Improving the Service

The majority of stakeholders felt that there is a need for mAs and the advocacy service it offers within the military veterans support sector, with it meeting needs that other organisations either do not or cannot. As such, it adds value to the sector and fills a gap in service provision. It was also expressed that the need for mAs will only increase in the future due to the increasing numbers of veterans who need support coming forward in search of help:

"We're seeing more and more people come through with more complex issues... so I think that advocacy is becoming more needed as opposed to it going the opposite way. I think that in terms of sustainability in terms of the amount of people that need the service I think that's increasing."

"Hopefully they get enough funding to sustain it. That is what it is down to. There's not much else like it, especially in Plymouth. mAs is so important."

"Hope that it does have longevity and continues to operate. I feel that if it doesn't that would be a massive gap in service provision for veterans, I don't know what would happen to the veterans."

The preventative benefits of advocacy were also recognised by one respondent as enhancing the case for its sustainability:

"In terms of sustainability, there is something about the preventative element of advocacy delivery. There is that return on investment where if you are able to support somebody to resolve issues, you prevent a crisis from escalating and somebody needing more specialised intensive support, and actually there is a cost saving in the long run, and obviously a benefit to the individual."

However, many respondents recognised the difficulty of securing funding. Three respondents subsequently suggested that mAs may be better placed to support individuals if it worked in partnership with other organisations:

"The best bet is working in partnership with other organisations working in the field to try and codeliver things... Improving Lives Plymouth are in the process of setting up a specific Veterans' Hub in Plymouth. I see seAp as part of that... delivering out of that hub, or being linked in closely enough that they can be supportive. Sustainability is difficult."

A minority of respondents felt unable to comment on its sustainability due to their limited knowledge of its effectiveness. Stakeholders were also asked for suggestions to improve the service. The most commonly suggested improvement was to expand the service, both geographically, and in terms of the number of Advocates, so the service could help more military veterans across a wider area.

"More of the same in terms of them trying to make sure they have the right number of people to meet the demand."

"Cover a wider area. It's frustrating when they say the postcode is not covered when there are people in need."

A number of respondents felt that it was important to increase awareness of the service to enable more veterans to benefit from the service and self-refer to the service, rather than relying on other organisations to recommend mAs and refer clients:

"It's like all service charities, advertisement is the key. Very few people actually know about seAp and what seAp does. It's not readily available for veterans to think 'Oh, that might be useful to me, I'll contact them."

Some respondents also felt that closer links with other organisations would be beneficial, including by clarifying their offering and who can and should be referred to the service:

"Clarifying the specific offer and how it is different to what other services are offering, and how it adds value so people from bigger charities know what is an appropriate referral to the advocacy service."

"Getting other services to understand what is different about advocacy and what impact it can have. I think that is one of the ongoing challenges across advocacy, but I imagine mAs is still in its infancy so that could be a particular area to think about."



8. Conclusions

In the period between SERIO's early findings exploration and the interim evaluation, there has been a continuation of business as usual, but also some refinement of service delivery. It was reported that changes in management structures; the bringing of Advocates together to reduce isolation; and enhanced supervisory practices have contributed to service delivery, and resulted in the smoother operation of mAs.

Evidence uncovered regarding the impact mAs has on its clients, and on the families of its clients, has been presented above, with client, Advocate, seAp staff and stakeholders' views on the additionality of mAs outlined. The perceived added value mAs brings has been widely reported by clients, Advocates and stakeholders alike, with clear evidence that it is filling a gap in existing service provision.

Results also pointed towards an appetite for improving promotion and, hence, heightening service awareness; developing a consistent narrative; introducing a greater level of geographical service coverage; and potentially conducting more preventative work, reaching service leavers at the point at which they are returning to civilian life, ensuring a safety net is in place before they are at risk of crisis escalation.

Results from the client survey show that clients' satisfaction levels with the mAs service are very high, and a number of clients mentioned that feeling someone was 'fighting their corner', and 'giving them a voice' were highlights of their participation in the programme. Others felt that the mAs support was better than other support services they had accessed in the past for several reasons, and many noted that the military focus of the service was helpful as it spoke the veterans' 'language' and understood their 'culture.'

Notable improvements have been recorded for mAs clients across all impact measures examined, using both the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and seAp's own impact measurement scale. Overall, 87% of service outcomes recorded represent a positive outcome. A number of positive results were recorded with respect to housing and homelessness, as well as positive financial outcomes for 140 cases. Many reported that their attitude to accessing support had changed positively as a result of their participation in mAs, and others described the positive impact on their mental health.

In collating this evidence, the evaluation has broadened the understanding of military advocacy, and highlighted its potential social and financial benefits, gathering information which seAp can now feed into a cycle of continuous improvement of service delivery as we progress towards the final stage of the evaluation.

The evaluation aims to learn more about the mAs and the potential benefits it offers to those who use its services. The final evaluation approach will be designed to build upon insight gained thus far through the early findings and interim stages, and will include a greater focus on demonstrating the return on investment generated through mAs.

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