

Veterans Minister applauds success of charity partnership



VETERANS MINISTER ANNOUNCES £2 MILLION GAIN FOR VETERANS THROUGH CHARITY ADVICE PROJECT

As the 2013 Scottish Poppy Appeal gets underway the Veterans' Minister, Keith Brown MSP today announced the success of a vital charity partnership project that has attracted both £2 million gained for members of Scotland's Armed Forces community and an expansion of the project across the country.

The Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP) is delivered by the Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and funded by Poppyscotland, the charity behind the Scottish Poppy Appeal, and three other charities (ABF The Soldiers' Charity, RAF Benevolent Fund and Seafarers UK). Since its launch in 2010 ASAP is making a huge impact on the lives of serving and ex-Service people and their families by delivering free and expert information, advice and support on a wide range of issues, including benefits, debt, employment, health and housing.

Announcing the news, Mr Brown was joined by two Edinburgh & Lothians ASAP advisers, Army veteran Alan Hamilton MBE and Fiona Salem, who are based in the West Lothian Citizens Advice Bureau. Also present were Gary Gray, Head of Welfare Services at Poppyscotland, and serving soldiers Fusiliers Jamie Wilson and Graeme Ward (both aged 20) from 2 SCOTS (The Royal Highland Fusiliers, 2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland).

The tremendous £2 million financial gain for hundreds of

members of the Armed Forces community was achieved in a number of ways including supporting people to claim benefits to which they are entitled, amounts being awarded in appeals, debt being written off and charitable grants awarded.

A three-year extension to the project and expansion into additional strategic areas from October 2013 means that, as well providing advice through a national helpline, ASAP is now available in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Dundee, Edinburgh & Lothians, Falkirk (funded by Falkirk Council), Fife, Inverness, Moray & Nairn, Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, Stirlingshire & Clackmannanshire and Perth & Kinross.

Veterans Minister Keith Brown said: "I congratulate ASAP, Citizens Advice Scotland and Poppyscotland on reaching such a landmark. The work done in fighting for benefits that veterans are entitled to receive shows the impact of the ASAP service and the skill of the staff who have worked tirelessly for our veterans.

□ "The Scottish Government has been a strong supporter of the ASAP service since its creation in 2010 and has contributed financially to its work with a grant of £6,000 towards a booklet for potential users of ASAP. The success of this work is clearly demonstrated through strong collaborative work between a range of charities and partners."

✗ Gary Gray from Poppyscotland commented: "Veterans can face a number of challenges after leaving the Armed Forces, from physical injuries and mental health problems, to not finding the right house or job or being able to deal with their finances. Poppyscotland and its co-funding charities are working to address the current and future needs of veterans and, through ASAP, we are tackling issues and great results are being achieved.

"However, we need to do more to reach those who are still in need of help and I am delighted that, thanks to the generosity

of the public who support us through the Scottish Poppy Appeal and other fundraising activities, Poppyscotland is able to expand the service in order to continue to make a difference to the lives of veterans and their families across Scotland."

Margaret Lynch, CEO of Citizens Advice Scotland said: "This is a project that we have been delighted to be a part of. The CAB service provides free, confidential and independent advice to everyone who needs it, but we are always happy to work with other charities where we can target advice to particular sections of society. Members of the Armed Forces community their families are a very good example of that, and our advisers across Scotland have been delighted to help them.

"The fact that we have reached this milestone today is a sign of what a terrific success the project has been so far. Putting £2 million in the pockets of Servicemen and women is something that will make a real practical difference to them in these difficult economic times. And we urge anyone in the Armed Forces community who has not used the project yet to come and see us to discuss any problems they have."

In the past three years 3,300 people have been helped, presenting over 13,000 issues. The main areas of need were benefits, debts, housing, employment and financial issues. Over 500 people benefited from a financial gain.

An individual that has been helped by ASAP said: "ASAP, and in particular my adviser whose continuing support, tireless work and relentless form filling, was a huge help to me as I was at my lowest and couldn't even open any mail as it came through the door. He restored my faith and trust in people and I will be forever grateful. I have no idea where I would be now if it wasn't for ASAP as I was in a very dark place, in pain and almost suicidal through frustration at constant bombardment of phone calls, forms and tribunals. I always speak extremely highly of them and refer any other veterans towards them. This project is highly deserving of recognition and reward and my

adviser deserves a medal!"

ASAP's confidential, Scotland-wide helpline number is 0845 231 0300.