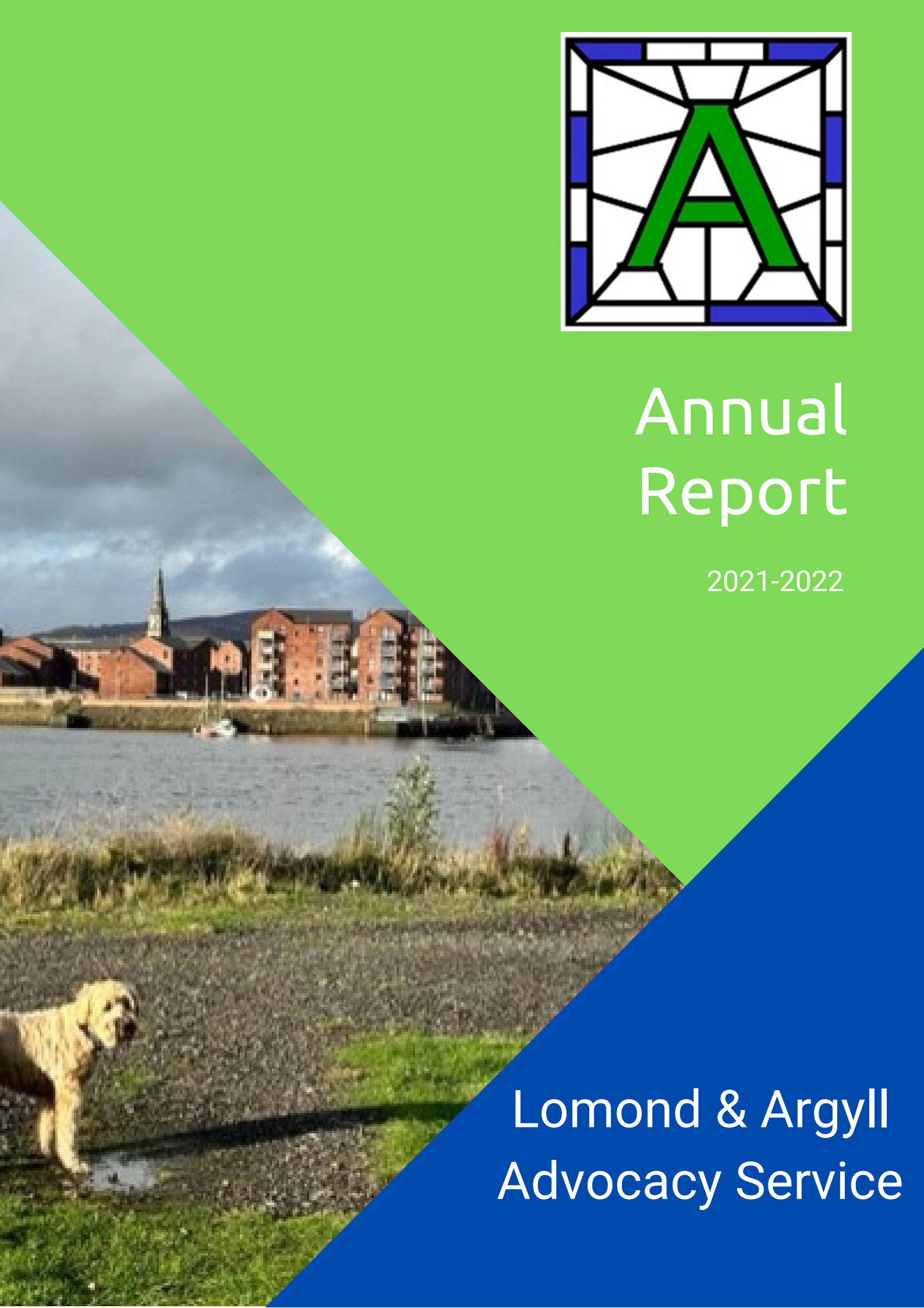




Annual Report

2021-2022

Lomond & Argyll
Advocacy Service



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02 Introduction



Lomond and Argyll Advocacy Service was formed as an independent entity in 2002 making 2022 an auspicious year as our twentieth anniversary.

Beginning as a small organisation whose aim was to help the marginalised and vulnerable members of our communities have their voices heard and their rights upheld, our mission has not changed, but the context we operate in has.

Throughout these twenty years, and never more so than today, we still seek to

"SPEAK THE TRUTH TO POWER"

Emerging from Alzheimer's Scotland in 2002, LAAS set out on its own journey of supporting the communities of West Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute. With a statutory role in supporting those detained under the Mental Health Act, LAAS also supported those with a Learning Disability and engaged with the Social Work Department on changes to day services, the introduction of Self Directed Support and supported all vulnerable members of our community to have their rights upheld with landlords, council departments, health services and any number of support services.

Over this time LAAS has always relied on funding from both statutory and non statutory sources whilst proudly asserting its independence and its right (indeed, its duty) to bite the hand that feeds it unapologetically and as required.

2022



Over these years our team and service have grown significantly, as has the request for our services, in particular from 2008 onwards as the word “Austerity” came to have a new meaning for us all. Sadly we anticipate this year and the coming winter to see a further increase in requests and referrals for help.

Coming out of the two years of Covid and lockdowns and restrictions, with funding for services reduced, while the need for help increases we can only serve those in the highest and most pressing of need.

With limited resources, it has proved challenging that we now regularly have to ask people to wait for our support and is undoubtedly a pressure on all our advocates.

It is a testament to both the organisation and, crucially, the advocacy team who continued throughout Covid, that we continue to provide such responsive services and retain so many staff for long periods, with many having worked for LAAS for a decade or more.

03

West Dunbartonshire

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE CORE PROJECT

West Dunbartonshire over the last year has been busy with a significant pressure of referrals.

Only those with highest statutory need took priority and with everything opening back up, it has been good to get back to face to face meetings with clients to gather views and, of course, upholding people's rights.

Covering legislation; Case Conference, Adult Support and Protection, Adults With Incapacity and Short Term Detention, again now more face to face which can only be positive for our clients.

Signposting and self-advocacy over a period has been crucial to help manage the volume of referrals coming to West Dumbarton.

With staff now in place this should ease and help us to move forward within Advocacy having broadened the strength that we have.



ONWARDS AND UPWARDS!

04 Changed Days



'Normal' within Changed Days is unlikely to be the norm again. Places have closed, staff shortages in care mean it can be difficult to meet clients, and some are still reticent about travelling, so to re-establish our visibility and redevelop contacts, our way of working had to change. We balance all aspects of Changed Days new and ongoing work, but due to having fewer hours compared to pre Covid times, it can take slightly longer to actively work on individual cases. However, as well as LAAS priority system, we have an immediate response to calls or formal referral by postcard advising of further contact.

Work undertaken in addition to issue based Independent Advocacy for people with Learning Disabilities in West Dunbartonshire includes:

- Joining The Dots – Partnership working with other agencies involved in transition from school/children's services to the adult world. This involvement has brought several younger clients to us, and strengthened our links with other organisations involved
- Self Directed Support Circle – WDC has not been successful to date in implementing SDS, a new lead person introduced fresh impetus and asked us to be involved in ensuring those who will benefit will have access to the process
- Independent Advocacy Drop In – Now that most venues have re-opened in some format, we have been asked to visit and provide occasional surgeries for clients to access regularly
- Daily Facebook posts offering news and information

05 Argyll & Bute

MID ARGYLL



The Mid Argyll advocates continue to deliver a service both in the Mental Health inpatient facility and in the community.

We seek to ensure people are supported to have their voices heard at Mental Health Tribunals, which have all been remote meetings during the pandemic (and beyond). We are working with the Tribunal Service to promote the need for offering people in person meetings again.

We support patients with ward reviews, help to access appropriate services to assist them with areas of difficulty, such as housing, legal services, access to treatments and assistance to access Social Security Staff and Welfare Rights.

The service has adapted to many new ways of working throughout the pandemic, using smart and video technology to allow us to work more effectively.

The demand for our support continues to grow, with increasing referrals from Social Work Services to support people to be heard and be included and have their rights upheld.

We believe our services will continue to be under pressure to meet the needs of those most excluded and marginalised our communities, due to the continued pressures that we are all experiencing and we will continue to prioritise those who have greatest need or who are most at risk of being voiceless.

COWAL & BUTE



Throughout the past year the volume of work in Cowal & Bute continues to be a challenge, in particular the increased number of Priority 1 referrals.

Other individuals referred to our service in Cowal & Bute in Priority 2 and 3 appear to be waiting much longer to be allocated however the new IT systems now clearly illustrate this data.

The advocacy co-ordinator very much welcomes these new IT systems which are ensuring easier, faster and more effective communication

KINTYRE, ISLAY AND JURA

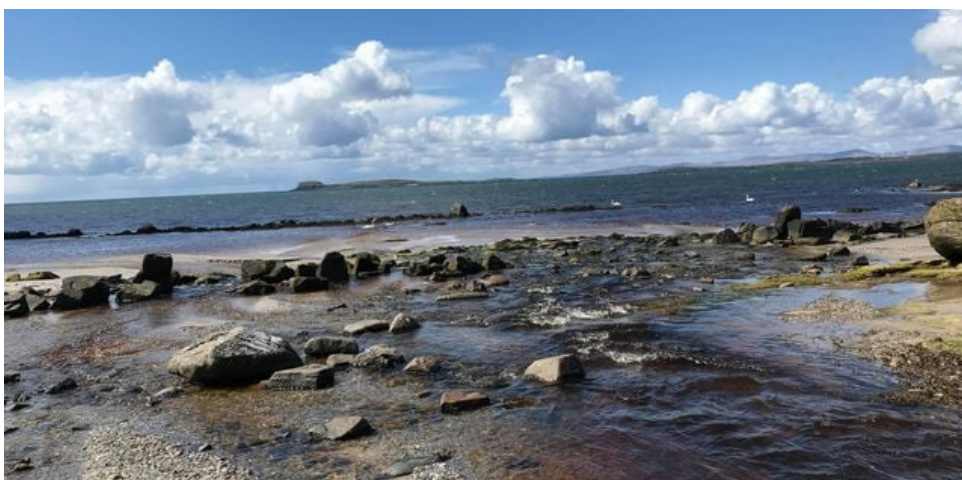
Casework for the Core Project in Kintyre, Islay and Jura has become much busier over recent months in particular.

We have two volunteers based here in Kintyre, one of whom has been with us for over 10 years. Volunteers are working remotely, carrying out some visits and their work is very much appreciated.

It has made a big difference to Kintyre having an additional colleague through the Recovery Advocacy Project too.

The adjustment with technology has improved our ability to provide people with additional support to connect to services and virtual meetings that previously had been a more challenging especially due to our remote location.

Working with other organisations and agencies continues to be helpful and we are keeping in touch with local groups.



OBAN & LORN

During the pandemic months, the people whom we worked with, struggled with the lack of 'face to face' meetings, although technology was available, often their ability was not, which many of us share.

Their ability to comprehend the continuing challenges faced by us all with COVID19, without being dismissive of testing, and wearing a mask, can easily become a barrier to their rights of Advocacy, should they be uncomfortable with our guidelines, for example masks.

Isolation came hand in hand with very low self-worth, across the whole area, and that continues to this day, as their lives have altered, without their permission/consent/choice.

The Oban case load has increased, along the complexity of the issues, and it can be very difficult engaging with Agencies/Organisations owing to staff shortages, changing roles, and to be honest, time to truly listen to the people whom we support, which makes it essential when we are our clients voices, upholding their rights, and ensuring others hear them, and address same.

As the challenges increase, so does the need for our service.



HELENSBURGH AND SOUTH EAST ARGYLL



Helensburgh and South East Argyll (HSE) continues to be challenging in terms of volume of referrals. During Covid lockdowns we were able to continue to provide advocacy support through using digital platforms or by telephone.

Since lockdown restrictions have been lifted and face to face visits have been reinstated, a waiting list was introduced.

Staff and a volunteer from other areas in Argyll, helped out as and when it was possible. This was much appreciated as it meant referrals were not on the waiting list for excessive periods of time before being allocated.

HSE has historically been relatively resource light and we will review the disposition of resources, in partnership with the Local Authority, in 2023.

06 Recovery Project

ARGYLL AND BUTE RECOVERY ADVOCATES

The Recovery Advocacy Project is entering its second full year of operation in 2022.

We now cover all of Argyll with the exception of Oban & Lorn and Mid Argyll and we are continually exploring how to develop the work to these areas.

The advocates are issue based, working with people on accessing services, addressing inequalities, supporting them to meeting and assisting in upholding their human rights.

We have assisted 75 people in 2021-2022.

The project has a recovery group operating and through this we are working on addressing barriers to individuals seeking help, self advocacy and how to create a positive image of recovery and challenge's and barriers of stigma.



RIGHTS RESPECT RECOVERY

07 The Future



In no small part due to the value placed in our services locally and, increasingly, nationally and due to the great work of our advocates and all our colleagues, LAAS anticipates a further increase in our West Dunbartonshire services in 2022/23 from our CORRA funding and an increase in Recovery Advocates in Argyll and Bute.

The value of their work means we are now in discussions with Criminal and Community Justice teams to provide services for their priority groups too.

As a community based organisation, we are keen to further develop our evaluation processes to clearly demonstrate the critical importance of local advocacy. As the Scottish Government consider further both a National Care Service and a National Advocacy Service it is imperative that this value isn't overlooked.

To say the last few years have been challenging would be no understatement. The pressure on services, both statutory and third sector are only increasing and the likelihood of increased financial pressure on families, carers, vulnerable individuals and on local authority services seem very real. It seems very likely this will translate into a greater need for advocacy.

I believe Lomond and Argyll Advocacy Service can move into this future and face these challenges with confidence - confidence based on the strength and experience of our team, the developments we have made (and will continue to make) and the energy and commitment of all our staff, very much including our new advocates.