

Introduction: *Why AdvoCard is doing equalities work*

Our first *Equality & Diversity Strategy* was laid out in November 2008, after a lot of work by a core group in consultation with interested parties. Five big aims were set out to help us reach as many different people as possible, so that we can become an even fairer and more inclusive advocacy service and employer. There's been an increase in equalities monitoring in Scotland in recent times, but the results are still a little patchy.

The first aim that we needed to put into place was to gather information about our service users, paid workers, volunteers and management committee regarding the six equalities strands (that is, age, disability, gender, race, religion/belief and sexual orientation) that they identify themselves with, as well as the part of Edinburgh they live in. We did this by drawing up a monitoring form and asking all those directly involved with AdvoCard to fill it out. We gathered responses from 90 service users 34 volunteers, 11 staff members and 5 management committee members.

The results during this first six-month period have given us some evidence that highlights the diversity of the people involved with AdvoCard. It also shows that there are certain groups within some equalities strands that are less involved with AdvoCard than expected, when compared to Edinburgh's population as a whole (2001 Census). We have chosen to focus this report on service users, as there were enough responses from them to begin to get reliable results. Paid workers and management committee were too few in number to draw conclusions from and easier to potentially identify their individual responses, though collecting this equalities information is still useful for the organisation to structure and plan its work. Volunteer responses will also need to increase before we can be sure of proposing actions, though there are potentially indications that the age and faith/belief strands might require our attention in the longer-term.

It is people in those under-represented groups that we're committed to focusing more of our efforts on getting in touch with, so that they have every opportunity to use our advocacy service and to be our volunteers, employees and management committee.

Results: *What the monitoring forms suggest*

Consent

The vast majority of the service users that we asked completed the monitoring forms. Only a few declined or were felt, by the advocacy worker, to be unable to give instructions at that time. Race/ethnicity had the highest response rate. Most of the other questions were responded to in similar numbers, which suggests that service users felt as confident responding about their sexuality (which might have been very sensitive for some) as where they heard about us (which is a more straightforward question). The lowest response rate was for using mental health services, which is unusual as it is one criterion for using our service: we have no simple idea why this might have been. Future monitoring forms will include a tick box stating *prefer not to answer*, as this would help distinguish between someone making a choice not to answer or simple oversight.

Mental Health Services

Two-thirds of service users were currently using mental health services. Several people responded that they had used mental health services at the moment and in the past – we had overlooked that this might be a possible response, so future monitoring forms will ask people to tick only one option.

Age

There were major differences between the age groups of service users and Edinburgh's adult population. Very few service users were 16-24 or 65+, while by far the highest numbers were aged 35-44. While generally there is evidence of younger and older people being more likely to be vulnerable, there are advocacy services other than AdvoCard that offer independent advocacy to those service user groups – this could explain the lower numbers we found. We'd need research from other sources to look into whether there are differences between mental health service users and the Edinburgh population, say as a result of wider health and social inequalities. In any case, this was beyond the scope of this initial report.

Gender

There were slightly more men than women using the service. Two service users identified as transgender.

Race/Ethnicity

Service users were predominantly White, though slightly less so than Edinburgh's population. A number of people responded that they were both White Scottish and White British. There were no Black service users. The number of races/ethnicities on the monitoring form has been reduced for future use, so that people would be offered the choice of Asian, Black, Chinese, Mixed, White and Other, with space to specify further if they wanted. This would help avoid responses - which we had not foreseen - such as several people ticking White Scottish and White British; while interesting in terms of perceptions of national identity, it does not really help us with BME work and it (slightly) over-inflates the percentage of White responses. There are also challenges for us in that only one in 250 people in Edinburgh are Black and while 90 service users is a relatively sizeable sample, we still need a much larger number of people to complete the monitoring form for us to reach any kind of valid and reliable conclusions around race/ethnicity.

Language

Several people needed help to communicate in English, but only one service user stated languages: Urdu or Punjabi. The question on the monitoring form has been made clearer by asking about a need for interpretation and translation.

Disability

Most of our service users thought they had a disability. The range and number of responses was very high; there were 55 different entries describing disabilities, health issues and needs in the *Other* sections alone. A quarter of service users did not tick mental illness in the disability section. A quarter stated they had a physical impairment and about one-fifth a long-term health condition, with fewer indicating a cognitive impairment or sensory impairment.

Faith/Belief

Service users' faiths were fairly well represented compared with Edinburgh's population, although quite a high number responded to *Other* faith or belief.

Sexual Orientation

There was a much higher percentage of gay and bisexual male service users than in Lothian's population.

Postcode

Service users in EH4 (e.g. Muirhouse) and EH11 (e.g. Sighthill) were much less involved than expected, as we ranked them as having the highest indicators of illness and disability in Edinburgh. People in EH12 (e.g. Gyle) and EH15 (e.g. Portobello) seemed under-represented also. Areas closest to AdvoCard's office (EH6, EH7 and EH8) were the most popular addresses.

How did you find out about AdvoCard?

Service users became aware of AdvoCard through a number of different services, workers and multi-media sources.

Conclusion: *What AdvoCard will do*

It's been really challenging to be confident about our results with equalities groups that are only present in very small numbers in Edinburgh's population, such as some BME and faith/belief groups. The information we have used for some comparisons has been from the 2001 census, so arguably a little out of date. Of greater concern is the length of time it might take to really find out to what extent, say Black people, were involved in AdvoCard, if we continued with just our own kind of evidence-based approach. Clearly, this is a first report and we will continue to gather more information over time, which in turn will give us a more detailed picture to look at.

We will be reporting back to our Management Committee, recommending that they agree our short-term objectives to:

1. make links with equalities groups and services in EH4 and EH11
2. make greater efforts to ask all involved with AdvoCard to fill out monitoring forms
3. use the amended monitoring form, as it is more user-friendly and easier to understand and process data
4. get expert guidance to help us find the most appropriate and creative ways for us to understand and take actions regarding the data we collect (now and in the future), especially for the most under-represented equalities strands in Edinburgh
5. review our *Equality & Diversity Strategy*, in light of our learning about how complex and contentious this working group's process has been.