

adviceⁿⁱ
the independent
advice network

Membership
Profile Report
2006/2007



Chair's Introduction



I am delighted to present Advice NI's latest Membership Profile Report which highlights the essential services provided by our membership targeting need as it exists within deprived geographical areas and within particular social groups across Northern Ireland.

The recently launched DSD Advice & Information Strategy outlines key principles for advice service provision including access by all people (the disadvantaged in particular) to a high quality service that meets their individual need. These principles are at the heart of this report, whilst it also demonstrates increasing demands being placed by the public on our members – demands which the membership are willing and able to meet – given the availability of sufficient resources to frontline services.

At a time of some uncertainty about the future, advisers deserve great credit for their continued dedication and commitment in providing a lifeline for vulnerable people. On a daily basis they increase benefit uptake for low income households, provide representation at Disability and Social Security Appeal Tribunals, offer housing advice for those in housing need, support people in financial difficulty and provide advice and information on a wide range of other issues.

I commend this work, and I hope you find this report interesting.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Conor McGale". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Conor McGale
Chair

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Registered Charity No:
XR16104

Workload

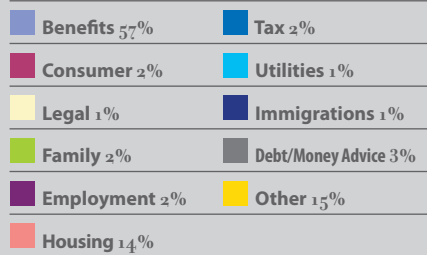
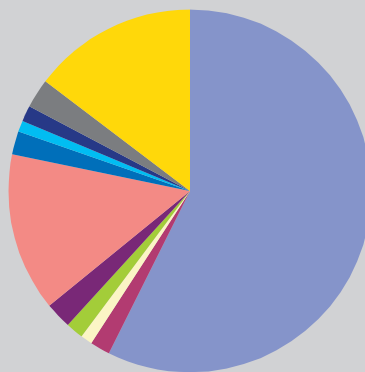
Total Enquiries: 213,970

Total Clients: 110,302

The workload statistics represents a substantial public service being provided by independent advice centres to vulnerable people across Northern Ireland.

The figures indicate clearly that these services are targeted towards addressing social need: in deprived geographical areas and within particular social groups. The services are further seen to be targeted by virtue of the fact that social security benefit recipients represent the bulk of people who want information, advice and representation.

Analysis of Total Enquiries



Response rate: 50 organisations

Case Study

As a result of the NIE campaign "For Your Benefit" a carer contacted our adviser on behalf of his elderly mother. His mother did not think she was entitled to Attendance Allowance as both she and her son had savings. An Information Officer advised her that AA was not affected by savings or income. The application was successful and low rate care AA was awarded.

Total additional weekly income generated: £43.15
[Disability Action]

JANUARY 2008

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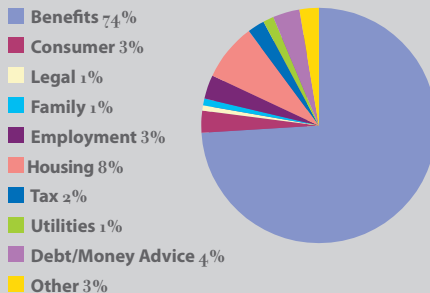
Members

Advice NI has a current membership of 71 organisations, which can be categorised into generalist and specialist providers.

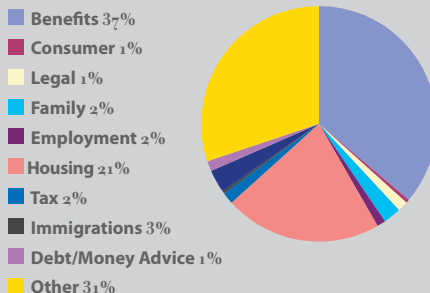
Generalist advice providers tend to have been formed by local people in response to local needs. They provide advice on a wide range of subjects and the advice service may be part of a wide range of community development activities, or alternatively advice may be the sole purpose of the organisation.

Specialist advice providers tend to focus their service on a specific issue or target their service towards a specific group of clients – covering the nine dimensions of equality under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. These organisations may be locally based or provide services right across Northern Ireland.

Generalist Workload



Specialist Workload



Case Study

Client was admitted to hospital following a severe depressive episode. When adviser saw client in hospital she had been found fit for work. Her Incapacity Benefit had stopped and she had nil income. Adviser assisted client to appeal this decision, made claims for Income Support and Disability Living Allowance.

Total additional weekly income generated:
£219.40
[Omagh Independent Advice Services]

FEBRUARY 2008

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Tribunal Representation

Disability

385

[27% increase]

Allowed:
202 [52 %]

Social Security

337

[32% increase]

Allowed:
201 [60%]

Total

722

[29% increase]

Allowed:
403 [56%]

- Data has been independently generated from TAS
- Relates to representatives attendance at final tribunal hearings

Advice NI members provide an extensive range of representation services for clients. The quality of this provision is clearly evidenced by the fact that success rates for appellants without representation is less than 20%

It is worth noting that there has been an overall increase in tribunal representation of 29% in comparison to 2005/2006.

Income Generation

Throughout the year Advice NI and members were heavily involved in benefit uptake activity supported by the Social Security Agency. The SSA's own evaluation of the work highlighted that the Programme resulted in an additional £6 million of benefits being paid to some of the most vulnerable people in Northern Ireland. Advice NI has also worked in partnership with NIE on benefit uptake activity. In total 1,020 holistic Benefit Entitlement Check's were carried out with approximately 44% of targeted clients receiving additional benefits.

Total Income Generation

Total income generation:

£14,989,256

Response rate: 31 Organisations

Case Study

An adviser made a home visit and conducted a benefits check for a carer, her husband and her daughter (who suffered from Down's Syndrome). Both parents had severe health problems and received assistance with Attendance Allowance forms (both awarded). This also brought in entitlement to a Severe Disability Premium for their daughter.

**Total additional weekly income generated:
£134.75 [Craigavon Independent Advice Centre]**

MARCH 2008

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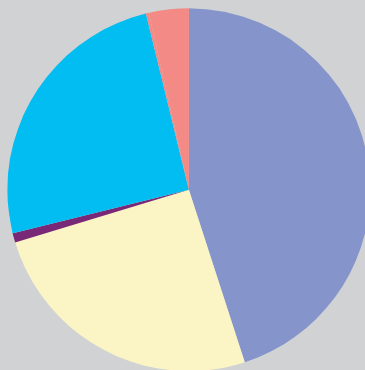
Services

Advice NI members are at the forefront in tackling poverty and need by ensuring that people have access to the services they require.

The most popular method of initial contact by clients is by visiting the centre either by appointment or drop in. Telephone contact accounts for the other most popular method of contact with a number of centres operating dedicated telephone helpline services. Other methods of contact such as email and letter remain an important method, albeit a minority, of accessing advice services.

In an effort to make services more accessible many centres operate outreach in various locations, provide a home visitation service and provide information sessions on an ad hoc basis as required.

Method of Initial Enquiry



■ Visit Appointment 46%

■ Visit Drop In 25%

■ Letter 1%

■ Telephone 25%

■ Other 3%

Response rate: 41 organisations

Case Study

As a direct result of calling SeniorLine a couple received backdated Pension Credit of £6,676 and an increase in their weekly income by way of accessing two Severe Disability Premiums and claiming Housing Benefit as they were entitled to have their rent paid.

Total additional weekly income generated:
£152.41 [Help the Aged]

APRIL 2008

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Service Delivery

Advice NI members make every effort within available resources to ensure that their services are tailored to meet the needs of clients. Examples of how this is achieved include the availability of induction loops, access to sign language interpretation and documents provided on tape and text phone service.

Additional service provision is being developed for migrant workers and other minority ethnic languages – both in terms of translation (the written word) and interpretation (the spoken word).

Advice NI members provide workplace services in redundancy situations. Many also provide information sessions and information bulletins as required.

Opening Hours

More than 30 hours per week

56 Organisations

Open 5 days per week

69 Organisations

Average hours per week

37 Hours per week

Response rate: 71 organisations

Case Study

Client's Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit payments had ceased because he did not understand the communication he had received from HMRC. The adviser negotiated with Tax Credit Office and was able to provide the outstanding information that was required to put the tax credit awards back into payment.

**Total additional weekly income generated:
£218.96 [Chinese Welfare Association]**

MAY 2008

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Quality Service Provision

Quality assurance remains a key focus for Advice NI members. In response to the diversity of service provision, Advice NI and members have embraced quality in the most efficient, effective and appropriate manner relevant to the service provided.

The Advice NI membership criteria applies to the entire membership, is based on IiP principles and applies a common set of standards that aim to improve the quality of advice provided to the public.

Building on this strong foundation 41% of members have either achieved or are actively working towards IiP status in their own right. Much of this work has been supported by the Advice NI IiP Group Contracting Scheme.

Quality Assurance Scheme

Scheme/Number of Organisations

Advice NI
Membership Scheme **71**

Investors in People
Standard **29**

Matrix Standard **4**

Charter Mark **2**

ISO Standard **2**

Lexcel **1**

Response rate: 71 organisations

Case Study

"Respondents that had used Investors in People within their centres found that the most useful themes within the Standard were Business Strategy, Leadership and Management Strategy and Learning and Development. The top three benefits for centres as a result of the Advice NI group contract were improved performance of the organisation, the development of a strategic plan and improved people management."

Julie Allen Consulting

**External evaluation of Advice NI
BSP-funded Quality Project (2007)**

JUNE 2008

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Human Resources

Response rate: 71 organisations

	Admin Support	Information Officer	Advice Worker	Money Adviser	Training Officer	Other	Manager	Total
Paid	14	11	71	7	1	68	26	198
Voluntary	2	1	17	1	0	25	0	46

Staffing

Staffing levels have decreased by 6% in comparison to 2005/6 in the main reflecting ongoing funding difficulties. The range of posts reflect the range of services provided, which in turn are reflective of the complex needs of NI society. Volunteering represents 19% of overall staffing – demonstrating the commitment of both the individuals and organisations to maximising community involvement in maintaining advice services.

Advice NI membership has increased highlighting the fact that the independent advice network is ever-changing in response to the changing needs of society within Northern Ireland. Changes to the demographic, cultural, social and economic profile of NI are reflected in the changing profile of organisations and posts within the Advice NI membership.

Case Study

Client was in receipt of Income Support and Disability Living Allowance. Income was maximised by virtue of securing a Severe Disability Premium, a Community Care Grant and support from St Vincent de Paul.

Debts: (1) £3,113.46; (2) £7,833.24; (3) £3,098.48; (4) £2,100.00; (5) £7,518.24.

Total additional weekly income generated: £68.45

**Support with Bankruptcy Application
(Debt Written Off): £23, 663.42
[Springfield Charitable Association]**

JULY 2008

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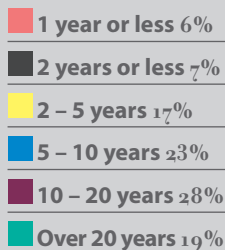
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Staff Experience

Experienced, knowledgeable advisers underpin service provision within the Advice NI membership. Testament to this is the fact that 70% of staff have been in post for 5 years or more; with 87% in post for 2 years or more. Allied to this is a range of ongoing training and development activity including Law Centre Training Programmes, CAB Training Programmes, Housing Rights Service Training Programmes, CPAG accredited tax credits training, child protection training, NVQ in Advice and Guidance and money advice training.

This staff resource is recognised within the DSD advice sector strategy 'Opening Doors' – the strategy stating that it presents an opportunity to support the professional development of staff and address issues of recruitment, staff retention and morale.

Experience (Years)



Response rate: 71 organisations

Case Study

Client was attending a day centre due to her mental health. She was unaware of her benefit entitlements. Due to the NIE 'For Your Benefit' outreach programme in conjunction with Advice NI adviser was able to assist client with a successful DLA application as well as connecting her Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) with other services provided by the organisation.

Total additional weekly income generated:
£60.25 [Rethink – Severe Mental Illness]

AUGUST 2008

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Money Advice Training Generalist Money Advice Courses

Quality Money Advice	8 Candidates
Introduction to Dealing with Debt	25 Candidates
Budgeting	17 Candidates

Money Advice Training Skilled Money Advice Courses

Debts and Courts in Northern Ireland	15 Candidates
Dealing with Rent Arrears	17 Candidates
Dealing with Mortgage Arrears	6 Candidates
Individual Voluntary Arrangements	14 Candidates
Introduction to Bankruptcy	7 Candidates
Negotiation Skills	8 Candidates

Advice NI has delivered 18 money advice related training courses with 117 learners attending. All courses have been developed and delivered as part of a UK-wide training strategy set up to develop high quality training for advisers in Northern Ireland. Three courses have achieved OCN accreditation (Introduction to Dealing with Debt: Level 2; Dealing with

Codes of Practice and Utilities: Level 3; Debts and Courts in NI: Level 3). Advice NI has also received a National Training Award in recognition of the outstanding achievement and success of the money advice training programmes.

Advice NI can also provide tailored money advice related training courses on request.

Case Study

"The two day workshop was excellent and all of the staff who attended found it extremely useful and interesting. I was particularly impressed with the way in which the training was arranged and delivered to the group. Those attending were not afraid to ask questions and thereby gain much more information and knowledge about the sensitivities and difficulties which surround this intricate subject."

Money Advice Trainee Feedback

SEPTEMBER 2008

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Case Study

Thirty seven year old man came to centre requiring help to complete his DLA renewal form. He had mental health difficulties for a number of years which included severe paranoia. His mental health was managed by the community mental health team and he had a very well established relationship with his community mental health nurse. His only contact with his GP was for repeat prescriptions. This was detailed on his renewal form.

His DLA renewal was turned down based on evidence from GP report.

Request lodged for the decision to be looked at again and it remained unchanged. Decision appealed to a tribunal which client found to be extremely distressing. Supporting evidence was secured from the Community Mental Team and he was given an indefinite award. Client has since moved into private rented accommodation and was awarded SDP on his IS claim.

Total additional weekly income generated: £108.70

[STEER Mental Health Charity]

Advice NI is the sole Open University accredited Assessment Centre in NI for the delivery of the NVQ in Advice and Guidance. Workshops are facilitated in Belfast and the North-West to support candidates achieve their NVQ award.

Building on a proven track record for NVQ delivery, a number of programmes have been delivered including an interactive e-learning project in partnership with National Energy Action and Workers Education Association. In order to build an element of progression into training programmes, partnership approaches have been developed with Law Centre and Housing Rights Service which enable advisers to migrate from knowledge-based learning to the NVQ work-based qualification.

NVQ Advice and Guidance (registered candidates)

NVQ Advice & Guidance	Number of Candidates
Level 2	4
Level 3	14
Level 4	11

OCTOBER 2008

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Membership Feedback

Advice NI is committed to providing high quality services in response to the needs of members. In order to ensure that services are continually improved, we conducted an online membership survey. Key findings from the analysis of the results are highlighted. Advice NI will ensure that the learning gained from the findings of the survey will impact on future service delivery.

Changes made to date include the introduction of new governance policies / procedures and the establishment of two new management sub-committees.

Membership Survey

100% of respondents felt Advice NI represented good value for money

96% of respondents would recommend Advice NI membership to others

91% of respondents felt Advice NI communicated with their centre often enough

100% of respondents had contacted us in the past year. Email was the preferred method of contact, followed by telephone

99% of Advice NI members are contactable by email

651 messages have been posted on AdviceLink (the Advice NI group)

Case Study

Client suffered from aggressive form of rheumatoid arthritis, her DLA award was reduced from high mobility & middle care to low care. Adviser represented client at appeal tribunal where he secured award of high mobility & high care and the duration of award increased. Arrears generated amounting to £3,603.60.

**Total additional weekly income generated:
£92.40**

[Limavady Community Development Initiative]

NOVEMBER 2008

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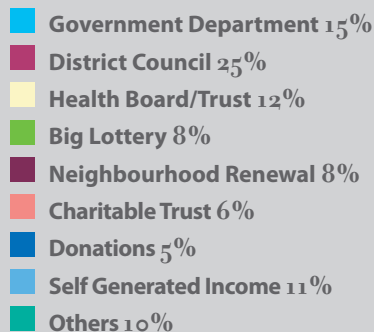
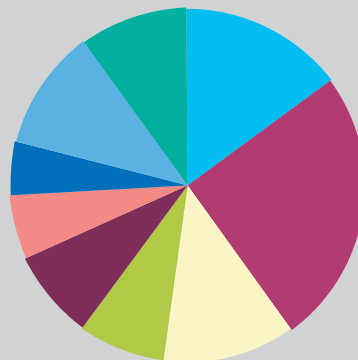
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Financial Resources

Securing sufficient funding to deliver essential advice and information services remains the key challenge facing the Advice NI membership. Whilst additional resources were accessed through the Department for Social Development's (DSD) Community Support Programme and via Benefit Uptake tenders, the reduction in funding from other sources continues to create problems regarding sustainability.

The increasing moves towards a competitive tendering approach has implications for advice providers. Risks include fostering competition and not collaborative working; a short-termism approach breeding uncertainty; and a risk the service is not deliverable and sustainable at the quoted price.

Funding Sources



Case Study

Client and wife were both finding it hard to cope physically. There was one visit from a social worker but as they refused help the case was closed. Adviser encouraged the client to think of a carer's assessment for himself. Client was very distressed by the changes in his wife's health, so adviser provided emotional support as part of this ongoing contact.

Outcome: Risks to personal health removed, couple able to remain at home. [Age Concern NI]

DECEMBER 2008

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e: claregreenfield@hotmail.com

AGE CONCERN NI

t: 028 9024 5729
e: cwilliamson@ageconcernni.org

**ALZHEIMERS'S SOCIETY NI
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e: roni@alzheimers.org.uk

ARDOYNE ASSOCIATION

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e: elaine@ardoyneassociation.com

**BALLYNAFEIGH COMMUNITY
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BARNARDOS NI

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**BELFAST UNEMPLOYED
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e: womensaidcoleraine@btinternet.com

CHINESE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

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martin@cwa-ni.org

CITHRAH FOUNDATION

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e: cithrah@hotmail.com

CIVIL SERVICE BENEVOLENT FUND

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e: sheila.fitzgerald@csbf.org.uk

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CORPUS CHRISTI SERVICES

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COSTA

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CHRISTIAN DEBT CENTRE

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DISABILITY ACTION

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e: hq@disabilityaction.org

**DUNGIVEN COMMUNITY
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DYSLEXIA & DYSPRAXIA SUPPORT

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**EAST BELFAST INDEPENDENT
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**EAST BELFAST MISSION
(STEPPING STONE PROJECT)**

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EPIC

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GINGERBREAD DERRY

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GINGERBREAD NI

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**GREATER TURF LODGE
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HOUSING RIGHTS SERVICE

t: 028 9024 5640
e: una@housingrights.org.uk

LIAISE

t: 028 3832 5764
e: jim@mzhouse.org

LIGONIEL IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

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e: advice@wolfhill.org.uk

LIMAVADY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

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e: debbiem@cccs.co.uk

LISBURN WELFARE RIGHTS

t: 028 92628903
e: lwrg@lisburn.org

LOWER NORTH BELFAST COMMUNITY COUNCIL ADVICE SERVICE

t: 028 9028 8887
e: kpurves@lnbcc.plus.com

MENCAP

t: 028 9069 1351
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MULTI-CULTURAL RESOURCE CENTRE

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