

ASDIC CONFERENCE MAY 2022

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

So – we’re now reaching the end of our conference and will all soon be making our journeys home. Having seen our development to date and considered some of the issues that face ASDIC and the Drop-In community – and some of the possible solutions - I’d now just like to take a look into the future. Some of what I’m going to tell you about is firmly in the pipeline, but some is in the ‘early ideas’ phase. Some is targeted at our membership, and some is looking at the wider picture across the sector.

Before going any further, you will recall from Barry’s introduction that the ASDIC team is planning a roadshow around the country later this year, to follow up on this conference. Not only will this be for the benefit of those that haven’t been able to join us here over the last couple of days, but it will also serve to cover particular issues in more detail and answer any questions or concerns. And of course, we’ll be looking for feedback – and seeking members views on what they really want from us.

So my explanations on the following initiatives will be brief at this stage, as they can be expanded on more directly to those concerned later on.

First and foremost, I’ll begin with what we are immediately planning for our membership – and the TANGIBLE BENEFITS to be had by joining ASDIC.....

Regional Support

- Coordinators
 - Our volunteer regional coordinators are beginning to liaise with all the Drop-Ins in their areas and will be the first point of contact. This means new and prospective members can be readily visited too.
- Local groups and meetings (physical and virtual)
 - It is hoped that regular get togethers – perhaps virtual meetings – will develop led by our RCs – and this is already happening in one or two areas.
- Workshops
 - We will deliver workshops in our regions – perhaps together with other veterans organisations – to share ideas and best practice and occasionally focus on a particular issue or delivery of training.
- VAPC liaison
 - Our developing relationships with the VAPC network will offer the wider perspective and link to governmental feedback....
- VPPP wider networking + legacy
 -and as the collaborative working and increased networking across the sector is encouraged by the VPPP programme, we believe our membership will find a more inclusive landscape in which to work.

Communications

- Community Hub
 - We have long felt the ASDIC community needed an online network on which to communicate. We now have a software specifically designed for communities, which we will be implementing over the next couple of months. This is an exciting development, which will offer direct support to our membership. It will allow us to share news, contacts and events from member to member, and amongst individual groups. We will develop it as the need demands and will be setting up appropriate protocols for its use as we progress.
- Website
 - If the Community Hub is the place for our network to find and share information, then the ASDIC website is our public ‘shop window’ for external organisations, and veterans looking for assistance. We’re aware that the present site needs reviewing – and this is a priority for us.
- Membership Engagement Officer
 - Sacha – will continue to keep closely in touch with members, welcome new ones, and ensure that we maintain up to date information

- Marketing and Communications Officer
 - Olivia – will focus on ensuring that the wider sector and the veterans themselves know who we are and what we do

Funding

- Guidance
 - There is not yet an easy answer to ready resources for our Drop-Ins, or indeed for ASDIC itself, but we increasingly strive to identify funding leads and support applications where we can. We are aware that sustainability is the issue here – and that support to the end user is at risk without it
- Advisory role
 - We are forging relationships with wider grant makers and helping them to understand our members, thus giving greater confidence in our community
- Collaborative opportunities
 - Working together as a community in identifying opportunities is key – and greater collaboration with all stakeholders as we progress initiatives in these areas will really help

VetCheck

- Success
 - I've already mentioned VetCheck and this is proving a great asset to our members.
- Developing process
 - We're now using online forms, and introducing a digital signature facility to streamline the process
- Greater efficiency
 - All this leads to greater efficiency for us and Veterans UK.....and I'd like to thank the team in the MOD for their cooperation as we developed the arrangements
- Swifter support to veteran
 - Most importantly it gets support to our veterans more quickly!

Then there are reference documents, directories and wider guidance to be further developed.....

Drop-In Handbook

- Grow your own Hub...
- Basics for prospective members
- Pointers on governance, sustainability, funding etc
- Templates for policies etc

We already have a guide on our website about setting up and running a Drop-In, produced by Forces Connect South East and our very own Roger Nield who has been involved with ASDIC from the start. We will develop this further over the coming months to include more detailed support relevant to the whole of the UK.

Funding and Training Opportunities

- Directory
- Buying in advice/support/lead speakers for presentations at workshops

We will be introducing a directory of funding opportunities on our Community Hub for members. We don't intend to deliver training ourselves at this stage, as there are many providers out there. But we would like to establish a listing of what we know is available.

Legal Awareness

We're now in touch with some legal advisors who could be useful to our members and their service users. This is a developing area, and we continue to consider how we might provide support.

Most important, of course, to the wider recognition of the value of our Drop-Ins, and the impact that they are having, is the gathering of the objective information to support our cause.....

Data

- Why?
- Collaboration
- Simplicity and aim
- Collection

As you will know, it is our long-held goal to gather relevant data from the coalface. We can glean a certain amount of information from our interactions with our membership, but there is more to be done. What we do must be simple – requiring little or no effort from our busy members – and be collaborative – taking full account of other initiatives in this area and working with them. The right data will help direct resources and give a greater understanding of need across our communities. This process has begun and will be developed gradually over the coming months to ensure that we can bring all our members onboard and continue to improve veteran support together.

And now some thought on how this data capture can begin to secure the future of ASDIC and its community....

Impact

- Supporting Sustainability and Resourcing
- ASDIC's impact
- Small Charities Coalition experiences – Small AND Mighty
- Work to secure our future

Data is at the heart of determining our overall impact across the wider veterans' welfare space. And a measure of that impact will influence the longer-term sustainability and resourcing issues that both our members – and we ourselves face. We are also aware that many of the smaller charities and organisations which support and supplement our work in local areas are faced with the same challenges.

ASDIC's impact on veterans in need is delivered second-hand, as we support the many Drop-In centres to provide a service on the front-line. Better communications between Drop-Ins and Regional Coordinators and improving liaison between our network and nationally focused agencies, will increase this impact. Working with the Covenant Fund's programmes, we've become the go-between for local interest groups and the wider national picture. ASDIC is a facilitator, effectively working to 'join things up'.

Some of you may be aware of the Small Charities Coalition, which, despite being enormously effective over the last 14 years, has recently closed down. Fortunately for its membership and subsequent beneficiaries, some of its key strengths and support are being transferred to the Foundation for Social Improvement (FSI) and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) so that continued help and representation can be delivered. But the specific support for small charities by a small charity, will be lost. I have now read in some detail their final report, aptly named Small AND Mighty, and it is remarkable how closely our development of ASDIC is running along the same lines of their success. You may of course ask – as I did when considering the importance of their role – why DID they fold? The answer, I fear, is that they struggled with the very same challenges that all small charities face, by being one – and were eventually overpowered by the issues which they had specifically sought to cushion for others.

It is vital that ASDIC prevents this situation happening in our own work – and takes heed of these lessons. And to this end we'll be commissioning research into our impact very soon – and perhaps get involved in studying the wider impact of all our contributing small organisations.

So that really brings me to a final summary for you to take away before I sign off....

Closing Message

- Visibility
 - ASDIC has had an exciting ride over the last couple of years, culminating in what I hope you've found a valuable conference. We've certainly enjoyed the journey so far – but our work goes on! We need to increase our visibility both within and outside our immediate sector, by continuing to increase our membership and championing the full benefits that maximum coordination and communication can provide...

- Ambitions
 - BUT we have no ambitions to become a large organisation, or interfere with anyone else's business. There are many in our sector who can probably cover the full spectrum of need IF they know about it, and IF we can join it all up. ASDIC's job is to facilitate, not take over what others should be doing. Small is beautiful – as well as being flexible, approachable and responsive, we firmly believe that small organisations understand and feel comfortable dealing with someone their own size. So... with some consolidation, ASDIC doesn't see any great expansion – we'll strive to do what we do now, only more efficiently and effectively.
- Funding and Resources
 - Of course, whatever our plans, neither we nor our members can do very much without adequate funding and resources. There's no doubt that the Covenant Fund is a game-changer, and it's great that there are other Trusts and Foundations (some here today!) who can see how a small investment can make a huge difference. If we are to achieve sustained funding, we need to ensure that the Drop-In story continues to come across loud and clear, and to improve the understanding of its huge impact on our most vulnerable veterans.

Future Strategy

- While we're pretty clear as to our broad future direction and confident that we can achieve it, we're working hard on a fully objective Strategy that will quantify our size and shape, necessary resources, timelines and milestones, and internal support and governance. An important part of that strategy will be what our members want from us and what their priorities are; we've heard some really valuable feedback over the past two days, and these conversations will continue over the summer and during our roadshow programme later in the year. We will certainly learn lessons from the Small Charities Coalition experience, and how we might better integrate with the existing sector. We just hope the larger members of the sector want to integrate with us!
- Voice and Representation
 - Finally, let me be clear that ASDIC has two fundamental tasks: to support our members and to represent them and their many individual beneficiaries to the rest of the sector; from delivery organisations, government and its agencies, to the general public, who are often unaware of the unique challenges veterans face, and the positive contribution that they make to society as they return to their communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attendance and your attention. I hope you've found it a valuable couple of days, and I look forward to working with you all in the months to come!