

The Impact of Advice

A brief report

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Introduction

At the ASA Conference in February 2003 there was considerable discussion about what we mean by the impact of advice, the extent to which it overlaps with or is different from outcomes, and the lack of clear evidence on which we can rely in seeking to prove the impact of advice. It was suggested that we conduct a quick trawl to see what evidence people had come across. I sent an email to those who had been present on the 3rd March and a reminder subsequently.

I am grateful to those who responded, and in particular to James Kenrick, John Edwards, Carol Moonlight, and Andy Short. I would also like to thank Penny Waterhouse who heard about it and responded, and Carol Buckland from the Citizens Advice Kent Probation Project, who provided information about their work.

The reports I looked at can be easily broken down into categories: national studies by Hazel Genn and others; and studies of individual advice agencies/projects.

Set out below are brief summaries of each report.

Adam Griffith
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National Studies

1 The Effectiveness Of Representation At Tribunals

By Hazel Genn and Yvette Genn [1989]

1.1 Although primarily concerned with the effectiveness of representation, this study necessarily has a great deal to say about the role of advice both because it is the necessary precursor to representation, and because many tribunal applicants were unrepresented, whether or not they had got advice.

1.2 The study considered 4 tribunals: SSATs, ITs, immigration appeals, and MHRTs.

It found that:

- The provision of advice has an important effect on the manner in which cases are ultimately decided. [p.63]
- In SSATs those appellants who had obtained advice were more likely to have their cases determined by a hearing, rather than on paper, were more likely to attend their tribunal hearing, and more likely to succeed with their appeals when they attend. [p.22 –23]
- In immigration appeals, about 80% of appellants had sought advice. [p.29] Those who had obtained advice were more likely to have their cases determined by a hearing, rather than on paper. [p.35]
- In ITs about 70% of applicants had sought or received advice. [p.38.] Applicants who obtained advice were less likely to withdraw their applications, and more likely to settle them. [pp. 44-45, 89-90] The relationship between advice and representation varies depending on the source of the advice. [p.48-49]
- Where information on settlements is available, there are differences between the amounts obtained depending on whether advice was obtained, and on the source of advice. [p.92]
- Unlike at SSATs, pre-hearing advice in ITs confers no advantage on unrepresented applicants. [p.95]

- 1.3 Chapter 5 of the report relies on qualitative information from interviews to argue that advice to appellants and applicants serves a number of purposes:
- To avoid incorrect adverse first-line administrative decisions [pp.126-134] This reduces the number of occasions in which tribunals are merely performing an expensive information-gathering function. [p.244]
 - To filter out of the tribunal system appeals or applications with little or no chance of success [pp.134-5]
 - To attempt to settle claims without the need for a tribunal hearing [pp.135-8] This is particularly true in ITs, but there is also scope in social security and immigration cases.
 - To assist appellants and applicants in the construction of their cases and collection of the evidence necessary to prove the case, whether or not they are going to be represented. [pp.138-147]
- 1.4 Advice and representation do however affect the time a case takes to come to a hearing. In each tribunal, appeals reach a hearing more quickly if the appellant has not been advised or is not represented. [p.148] The extent of the delay varies between tribunals and varies according to the source of the advice and representation. [pp150-54]

2 Paths To Justice

By Hazel Genn and others [1999]

- 2.1 Chapter 5 considers outcomes in detail, and their correlation to other factors, including whether or not the respondent received advice, and the type of advice received. It should be noted, firstly, that 70% of those who obtained advice were advised that something could be done. [See Figure 5.1, p.147]
- 2.2 The analysis is conducted in terms of four possible outcomes:
- agreement [whether or not court or tribunal proceedings were started]
 - court / tribunal or Ombudsmen's decision or order
 - no resolution
 - no action
- 2.3 The significance of advice in relation to outcome is first considered in terms of 3 categories:
- legal advice [solicitor or occasionally law centre]
 - other advice [all other sources including CABx]
 - no advice.
- 2.4 This produced the following correlation between advice sought and resolution of the problem: [Figure 5.5, p.154]

| | Agreement | Court etc order | No resolution | No action |
|--------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------|-----------|
| Legal advice | 32% | 30% | 37% | |
| Other advice | 33% | 11% | 55% | |
| No advice | 37% | 7% | 44% | 12% |

The extent to which respondents achieved any kind of resolution varied considerably depending on the type of problem. Neighbour problems and landlord problems had very low resolution rates as compared with divorce and separation problems, tribunal matters, money problems and consumer problems. [p.155-6]

- 2.5 In some categories of problems it is possible to compare the outcomes for those who did and did not seek advice. In some cases, notably neighbour problems and landlord problems, the obtaining of legal advice was particularly significant.

Explaining Outcome

- 2.6 A multi variate analysis was used to identify the factors that were significantly associated with the outcome of cases.

- 2.7 One factor considered was advice received, which was redefined as follows:

- 'legal advice': involving advice from a solicitor [and occasionally law centre]
- 'other advice where action taken': this involved the adviser taking positive steps to assist in the resolution of the problem [which I shall refer to as active advice]
- 'other advice where no action taken': this involved the adviser in simply offering information or advice or advising the respondent to go elsewhere [which I shall refer to as passive advice]
- 'no advice' [p.170]

Type of advice obtained

- 2.8 After controlling for the factors included in the analysis:

- Cases where no advice was obtained were 45% less likely to be resolved than cases where legal advice was obtained
- Cases where passive advice was received were 30% less likely to be resolved than those where legal advice was received.
- Cases where active advice was received had similar results to those where legal advice was received.

- 2.9 This 'reflects the discussion in Chapter 3 about the extent to which the provision of mere information or advice may be inadequate for certain kinds of cases and certain kinds of respondents'. [p.172]

Conclusion

- 2.10 The analysis shows that when legal advice or active advice is obtained, the likelihood that a case will end in agreement, adjudication, or court order is increased, so that an above average rate of resolution is achieved, whereas the same types of problems without legal advice or active advice will have a lower than average rate of resolution. [p.178].

3 The First LSRC Periodic Survey Of Legal Need

Pascoe Pleasence and others [2002]

- 3.1 The Legal Services Research Centre survey largely follows the pattern of the survey carried out by Hazel Genn and others in *Paths to Justice*. Only limited information is presently available.

- 3.2 The summary compares the action taken by advisers, i.e. CABx, other advice agencies and solicitors in terms of whether they provided active assistance, and the

forms which that took, e.g. contacting or negotiating with the other side, preparing paperwork, or attending court.

3.3 The only direct comment about advice and outcomes is as follows:

‘Advice tended to be sought with more serious problems. As problems grew more complex, advice seemed necessary in order to maintain success rates (in terms of meeting objectives). Although no significant differences were observed in whether respondents obtained their objectives if they had or had not obtained advice, this appeared to be a positive reflection of the impact of advice in more serious cases.’
[Summary, para 60]

Studies of Individual Agencies or Projects

4 Getting Positive Results

‘A research report describing user needs, service satisfaction and advice outcomes’ in relation to the Camden CAB Service HIV project.

By Penny Waterhouse [1997]

4.1 The research concluded that:

- The project was generally successful in meeting needs and getting results, particularly in gaining financial security [18 of 20 respondents]
- The project improved health and well-being: 18 of 20 respondents reported health gains, both physical and mental health improvements. [p.2]
- Gains on housing and employment are more sporadic. Gains on civil rights, family and community care, personal support and development are less likely.
- The CAB makes a significant and positive contribution to outcomes for its users. It is likely that these outcomes would not have occurred without CAB intervention. [p.3]

4.2 Problems in measuring the extent to which the CAB was responsible for outcomes are discussed [p.4]

In terms of outcomes:

- 18 of 20 respondents reported health gains
- 18 of 20 respondents gained some financial security
- 8 of 15 respondents with housing difficulties have resolved these in some respect
- 5 of 9 respondents resolved their employment problems, to varying degrees
- 1 of 9 respondents obtained civil rights successfully. [p.30]

4.3 ‘An unexpected outcome is users’ appreciation of the way in which the staff deliver the service. The way in which users are treated is an important part of what people get from the project; eliciting feelings of self-esteem and positive outlook which is reported by users to reduce their stress and improve their physical and mental health.’ [p.30]

4.4 An outside professional auditor audited 14 of 20 cases. The advice was generally found to be sound. ‘The results of the audit indicate a link between good advice and good outcomes: good advice gives good results.’

- 4.5 'The audit also indicates that there is a difference between user satisfaction with advice and outcomes and professional assessment: users are much less critical compared to professional evaluation. The value of the service to users is such that people trust the project to take care of their interests and assume that any unmet needs are due to other people or to the rules.' [p.37]

5 The Effectiveness Of A Local Community Care Rights Project

A report by Margaret Coombs with Andrew Sedgwick is summarised in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Findings dated August 1988 – Ref 828

- 5.1 From 1995-97 the Oxfordshire Community Care Advisory Group appointed an independent, community care rights worker to help people to obtain their full entitlements under the community care legislation.
- 5.2 A study of the first 180 referrals found that, of the 106 people who worked directly with the project, about three-quarters (79) achieved their goals. The findings also suggest that better-off, well-organised and assertive people were more likely to be successful.
- 5.3 Details of what was achieved are set out in table 2 of the summary.

6 An Evaluation Of The Health And Advice Project: Its Impact On The Health Of Those Using The Service

By S Abbott and L Hobby. July 1999. Report No. 99/63.

Published by The Health and Community Care Research Unit, University of Liverpool.

- 6.1 This analyses the Health and Advice Project [HAP], a CAB initiative offering benefits advice in primary care settings, investigating the impact of the service on the health of the users.
- 6.2 The 48 subjects who received an increase in income after using the HAP service believed that the increase had improved their health-related quality of life, and showed statistically significant improvements in 3 aspects of health as measured by the SF-36:
- the limits which emotional problems put on the range and extent of all types of work ['role functioning – emotional']
 - degree of nervousness / calmness, happiness / sadness ['mental health']
 - levels of energy and tiredness ['vitality']
- 6.3 The improvements did not continue between 6 and 12 months, although most 12-month scores were higher than at first interview. [p.26-27]
- 6.4 Reductions in GP consultations, prescriptions in general and the prescribing of drugs for the first time decreased in the case of those whose income increased, and increased in the case of those whose income did not increase. However, these changes were not statistically significant. [pp.1, 29]
- 6.5 The report states that these results represent the first successful attempt to measure statistically significant health gain associated with welfare benefits advice services.
- 6.6 29 of the 48 whose income improved reported improvements in health and/or how they felt about life, including:

- feeling more optimistic, reduction of stress and worry
- feeling able to remain at home rather than living in a nursing home
- better quality of life
- feeling less depressed and more confident
- a better diet
- the ability to get out more
- free dental and eye care as a result of receiving benefits [p.22]

6.7 The report refers to other studies:

One, by Reilly et al [1996] found statistically significant health gain associated with general advice services in primary care for a population of homeless people who were not registered with a GP at the time of receiving advice. [p.35]

6.8 Appendix 1 discusses the Birmingham CAB project, which began in 1990, and involves 7 projects. The service has been evaluated 3 times:

- to determine the extent of income maximisation achieved
- a survey of users and others involved
- seeking to identify the impact on health

6.9 The third study reported significant financial gains, and found a trend towards improvement on almost all health –related questions, but the differences were not statistically significant. [p.38-39]

7 Ten Years Of Casework At Luton Law Centre

By Adam Griffith [1999]

7.1 This report analyses the results recorded for all cases that were opened and closed at the law centre in its first 10 years. It is primarily of interest in terms of its analysis of outcomes, and the distribution of the different outcomes as between the main areas of work done by the law centre: employment, housing, immigration and benefits.

7.2 Appendix I to the report sets out the money obtained for clients in employment cases which started in the years 1989 to 1997 inclusive, the amounts of which are broken down into different bands.

8 Completing The Circle Of Service: Talking To CAB Users

By Penny Waterhouse [2000]

8.1 This project collected information about the experience of people receiving housing advice from CABx. It included six separate projects, one of which considered 'advice outcomes'. Details are given of the main findings in that respect.

8.2 The commentary on the findings includes the following:

- *advice satisfaction* – most people are satisfied with the advice they get from the CAB, although there is more criticism with advice than with service arrangements. There appears to be a link between advice satisfaction and expectations: those who get what they expect (in the main, information and advice) are more likely to find advice useful; information and advice expectations are more likely to be met than expectations for action and advocacy;

- *advice outcomes* – there is evidence of positive gains as a result of CAB housing work. Where problems remain unresolved, this is not seen as the result of CAB ineffectiveness. Most people are satisfied by the outcomes from their CAB contact, including where this progressed the problem in the right direction. Poor results are mainly due to inaction by other agencies. There is evidence that sustained action by the CAB is a factor in getting a good result; and there were some cases where the survey highlighted further action that the CAB could take to improve outcomes.
 - In a number of cases, participating bureaux were more critical than users: about the advice they received; about the outcomes; and about the action taken by other agencies. Of interest, in one bureau, assessments of outcome made without feedback from users were more positive than those made by users. There is clearly a difference between satisfaction and effectiveness; and a difference between assessments made by different stakeholders.
- 8.3 The report discusses ‘the problem with outcomes’ and the difficulty of categorising them. It suggests that there appear to be three factors that can influence outcomes: the capacity of the person to progress the issue; the effectiveness of the advice intervention; and the legal and other remedies available.

9 Dial House Chester: Independent Assessment Report

By Dr Leah Pybus [2000]

- 9.1 This assessment brought together the opinions of 140 clients, staff, café users and representatives of external organisations to highlight the strengths of Dial House, and to identify weaknesses in its service, and opportunities for improvement in the future. [p.45]
- 9.2 In 1998-99 Dial House responded to 4,325 queries, of which 1,947 concerned benefits. It helped disabled people to claim a total of £979,330 in unclaimed benefits. [p.2]
- 9.3 The report states that:
- ‘For all of those clients using Dial House the support was considered vital to the quality of life of clients.’ [p.16]
 - Dial House was central to helping clients overcome feelings of isolation through increasing their own awareness of disability issues and enabling clients to obtain greater freedom of movement.
 - Dial House support plays a central role in the social and economic empowerment of disabled people in the region. [p.19]
 - Feedback from doctors in the area also emphasised that the efforts of Dial House certainly contributed to the improvement of the health and well-being of patients, and that this was supported by the opinions of patients themselves. [p.39]
 - Feedback recognised that the information and advice offered through Dial House played an important role in promoting the employment of disabled people by local businesses. [p.42]
 - The resources offered through Dial House enable other organisations to provide their own clients with a better quality of service, and is of great value at a time when support agencies struggle to find the necessary resources to meet the needs of clients. [p.44]

10 Mutual Benefits

A short [1 page] article by Richard Bundy, a principal officer at Salford city council, in the Health Service Journal 15.2.01

- 10.1 The April 1999 *IMS Health Survey* found that money worries were the most frequently cited cause of depression, closely followed by death and illness in the family, work worries and relationship problems.
- 10.2 Over the past few years, advice agencies in different parts of the country have been working with GP practices to provide advice in primary health locations, particularly on benefit entitlement and debt.
- 10.3 The article refers to reports on such projects in
 - the West Midlands
 - Derbyshire
 - Wigan
 - Ribble Valley
 - The Broughton area of Salford
- 10.4 The article describes the Broughton health project. It outlines the financial outcomes achieved. It notes that 44% of respondents to a staff questionnaire felt there had been a noticeable reduction in the number of subsequent visits from those patients referred.
- 10.5 The Broughton health project is participating in wider research being conducted by the Health and Community Care Research Unit at Liverpool University.

11 **Nacab Kent Probation Project: Report On Recidivism Amongst Clients Referred To The Project Between April 1997 And October 1998**

By Tim Samuel, July 2001

- 11.1 'NACAB Kent Probation Project provides a welfare benefits and money advice consultancy and casework service to the National Probation Service, Kent Area, staff and their clients.
- 11.2 In a time where "effectiveness" and "what works" is dictating the nature of interventions with offenders, we felt it important for us to try and assess whether our Project is effective. Social Welfare projects have few concrete ways of determining their effectiveness. Records of gains and debts, user satisfaction surveys and equal opportunities monitoring are a few of the ways in which effectiveness has been measured. However, as the aim of the Probation Service is primarily to reduce offending, it was felt an assessment of the impact our assistance has on recidivism rates may be an additional measure of effectiveness.'
- 11.3 'The Project allocates a casework category to each client we work with.

Category A: This work requires very little input from the Project. The work is mostly advisory.

Category B: This is work we have undertaken that has not been completed. This happens because either the client has withdrawn from the process or we have been unable to continue working with them.

Category C: This is short-term casework that has been completed, whether successfully or not. The level of the casework is usually single issue.

Category D: This is in-depth long-term casework. This could be multiple debt work, benefit appeals or both.'

11.4 The report analyses the cases of 301 clients

The number of clients in each category was

| | |
|------------|-----|
| Category A | 120 |
| Category B | 44 |
| Category C | 87 |
| Category D | 50 |
| TOTAL | 301 |

The relevant percentages in terms of re-offending or not were

| | Re-offended | Did not re-offend |
|------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Category A | 46 | 54 |
| Category B | 43 | 57 |
| Category C | 34 | 66 |
| Category D | 20 | 80 |
| TOTAL | 38 | 62 |

11.5 These can be compared with recent statistics suggesting that the percentage of offenders commencing community penalties who re-offended within two years ranged between 52% and 58%.

'For a Social Welfare organisation the above results would seem to compare very favourably and represent a vindication of the work done, were it not for the complications they create'.

11.6 The report notes that the risk of re-offending can be dependent on gender and age as well as the person's history and type of offences.

11.7 It provides breakdowns of the figures according to gender and age. The figures for gender suggest that the project has been particularly successful with women. In terms of age however the numbers in each group are too small to enable conclusions to be drawn.

11.8 The report concludes:

'As has already been noted we do not wish to make any radical claims about the effect of Social Welfare advice and assistance on recidivism rates. There are too many other variables for us to make such claims. Neither the number of previous convictions nor the risk of reoffending has been looked at.

However what is most pleasing to us is the trend that is visible in all the tables that the level of assistance seems to effect the recidivism rate. We would of course hope that this is the case but trust that further work can be done to see if there is a link between social welfare work and recidivism rates. As the clients we are dealing with are also those who are most financially vulnerable, it may also serve to inform any debate on the link between poverty and crime.'

Comment

- 11.9 Further information on these results has been provided by Carol Buckland, the project manager. In a telephone conversation on 4.4.03, she said that
- The Home Office looked at their statistics in more detail and added in the likelihood of the person reoffending, based on a risk assessment. Although their analysis was less impressive, the draft report did suggest that they had helped some specific groups, including women and those with whom they worked in depth.
 - The Home Office produced a draft report, but nothing since. The person she has been dealing with at the Home Office has moved on. She is unsure whether the report will be published.
 - There are a number of factors which affect the likelihood of reoffending, which means that it is difficult to show that any improvement was solely due to CAB action.

12 Get Into The HABIT

Report on the Pilot Phase of the Project of the Health Advice Benefits Initiative Team.

By Linda Carr and others [2001]

- 12.1 HABIT is a new service for older people in Merseylive Primary Care Group. It is a multi-agency initiative aiming to increase awareness of benefits and services for older people and to maximise benefits for those who are eligible. The lead agency is Age Concern Liverpool. [p.1]
- 12.2 The report provides details of the help requested from the project, with particular reference to benefits and the need to access services.
- 12.3 The report suggests a number of ways in which projects such as this can have an impact:
- The report claims that early intervention by HABIT can ease long-term poverty and reduce the pressure on the health service and other social services, particularly the more acute services. [p.18]
 - The report suggests that claiming benefits can increase the council's Standard Spending Assessment [p.18-19]
 - 'In addition, given the increasing relevance of income derived from charging for community care services, this is a further incentive to ensure people are receiving their full entitlement to benefits.'
 - It also improves revenue collection for the authority – rents and council tax.
 - It is also cheaper, quicker and easier for the council to process a claim for HB/CTB for a claimant getting IS.
 - Increased spending power benefits the local community as benefits are usually spent locally.
 - Research by John Moores University indicates that for every £100,000 spent on local shops and businesses, another job is created within the economy. [p.19]
- 12.4 Further information on the HABIT project is provided by a subsequent report

13 Someone to turn to . . . Someone who cares

An interim summary report, by Lisa Knight [2002]

- 13.1 This analyses the results achieved for HABIT clients in terms of financial and non-financial outcomes.

It summarises the findings of two focus groups, whose participants explain the benefits that they attribute to the project in terms of

- Increased outcome
- Improvement in living conditions
- 'Psychological' benefits

The report summarises the results of a telephone survey, which mentions similar benefits and, in addition, the impact of the service on subjective health status.

14 Hidden Benefits

Research into the work of DIAL Waltham Forest, by Benson-Waterhouse [2003]

- 14.1 This report notes the increasing interest in the question of outcomes. It claims to take 'a pragmatic approach'.

- 14.2 The report analyses the benefits gained by clients in terms of

- Practical outcomes
- Health outcomes
- Quality of life outcomes
- Personal outcomes

Details of the findings are set out in Table 1.

- 14.3 The research found that:

- DIAL WF has a major impact on the lives of people who use its advice service
- The effect of increased income on other outcomes, through take-up of disability welfare benefits, is marked; in particular in reducing social exclusion
- Practical and personal gains are substantial and have a positive affect on quality of life, including on health
- Difficulties in achieving good outcomes from social services are reported

- 14.4 The picture emerging is that:

- outcomes of value result from advice work *and* from the way the service is provided
- the direct result of advice work and service delivery are practical and personal gains
- practical and personal gains lead to improvements in health, particularly mental health, and to improvements in quality of life.

- 14.5 The research also highlights some outcomes that are less successful – housing adaptations and aids required by those with worsening health; physical health outcomes; promoting independence. The reasons for this are not clear from the research and DIAL WF will need to explore further the factors that influence these findings.