

# **VoiceAbility Scotland Quarterly Report**

FY24 - 25 Q2; 01/07/2024 – 30/09/2024

# VoiceAbility Contract Monitoring Report

Service Name	Social Security Scotland Benefits Advocacy
Contract Name	VoiceAbility Scotland; Case/540750
Commissioning Authority	Social Security Scotland
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# Executive Summary

## Headlines

### Group Advocacy:

The primary goal of running group advocacy on Low Emissions Zones is to directly hear feedback and personal experiences from unpaid carers. The LEZ is a restrictive policy and may have a disproportionate impact on disabled people and their carers. We are running three in person sessions at different venues and taking place at different times in an effort to be accessible to people. We have also included virtual joining options and will be running two additional sessions over Microsoft Teams for those who cannot attend in person but still want their voice to be heard. The feedback that we gather will be collated and passed on to researchers from the Scottish Labour Party who will be sharing the findings with Labour MSPs in order for them to challenge this in Parliament.

All available dates can be found on our website.

### Empowering our Advocacy Partners

We recognise the need to embrace digital capabilities in a way that is both impactful and conscious, ensuring that while technology drives efficiency and innovation, it never overshadows the human element at the core of our work. Our recent partnership with **Sabio** and **Salesforce** is designed to enhance the client journey through smart use of data and AI, while maintaining a focus on the personal, human interactions that remain crucial to building trust and delivering meaningful support. By balancing digital transformation with empathy and understanding, we are committed to creating better outcomes for the people we serve and deeper insights for our commissioners.

### Festival of Politics

One of our Team Leaders and the Community Volunteer Co-ordinator attended the Festival of Politics which ran from Monday 19<sup>th</sup> August to Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> August at the Scottish Parliament Building.

The festival offered opportunities for informed debates on a range of social, political, and environmental issues facing the world today.

We attended five sessions in order to gain new insights on topics relevant to VoiceAbility, as well as to provide new ideas for group advocacy.

### **Health Creators: Health Inequalities in Scotland**

This session asked how do we work together to create good health for all? Health inequalities mean that people living with social, economic, physical disadvantages are more likely to experience poor health and die earlier.

The panel discussed the right to health and access to health services as they specifically impact on race, prison population, poverty and the role they play in tackling health inequalities.

This session was chaired by Emma Harper MSP.

### **Home sweet home?**

The panel discussed the transformation of housing from provision of a warm, safe, and secure 'home' to 'commodity' in the last few decades. They discussed how this is fuelled in part by a rising demand for private housing while the state's social housing has declined. Several councils across Scotland have all declared a housing emergency for a range of reasons and there's been a 130% increase in the last decade of children in temporary accommodation. The panel discussed compulsory sales, land tax values and public land, and potential solutions of these issues.

This session was chaired by Graham Simpson MSP.

### **Reading between the lines: information literacy in the 21st century**

This session covered how technology users are overwhelmed with information that competes for our attention or money. This panel discussed how that information is used to channel this to us in ways that we might not want. This loss of control over our information can lead us to believe in false narratives that harm other people and ourselves. Young people in particular need tools to control their own information and how to separate fact from fiction online. This session asked: how can we nurture responsible and ethical consumers of information in the digital age?

### **Mental Health and Young People**

This session discussed studies as supporting the belief that engaging with arts and creativity has a positive impact on people's mental health, and the potential of the arts to relieve stress, build resilience, support identity and empowerment, and develop vital social connections among children and young people.

This session was chaired by Maya McCrae, a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament.

### **Responsible Debate**

In this session the panel discussed how, as the world becomes more polarised, it is becoming clearer that the way we debate and discuss important issues is preventing us reaching solutions. The panel also discussed the question of 'how can we debate and discuss in a way that deals with the important challenges facing us?'

This session was chaired by Ben Macpherson MSP.

Attending the events this week gave a deeper insight into sociopolitical issues that are impacting local communities across Scotland and gave several new ideas for group advocacy sessions to run in Edinburgh.

## **Voluntary Health Sector Annual Conference**

We are thrilled to announce that our submission to the Voluntary Health Sector Annual Conference 2024 in Scotland's Vital Health Sector poster competition has been shortlisted as a finalist.

Other finalists include:

- Action for M.E.
- The Breastfeeding Network
- CANDU (Dundee Cancer Support Network) SCIO
- Finn's Place
- Living Streets
- The Sorted Project
- Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care
- RNIB

Our poster showcases how our services contribute to addressing health inequalities and facilitating access to entitled support for individuals. Our approach involves providing tailored support to address specific challenges faced by individuals, such as advocating for changes to a person's care package, when necessary, resources are removed, ensuring that the level of care continues to meet the individual's needs. Additionally, our group initiatives aim to amplify collective voices to shed light on issues affecting broader demographics. For instance, in a recent session, participants articulated barriers to accessing mental health support services. Furthermore, we are proud to offer a complimentary 5-day course for high school pupils, empowering them to understand their human rights and advocate for themselves and others.

We eagerly anticipate the opportunity to present our poster at the conference, where we will have the privilege of engaging with professionals in the voluntary health sector. This platform provides an excellent opportunity to showcase our services, raise awareness, and foster potential partnerships with other professionals. We are committed to making a meaningful impact and are excited about the potential collaborations that may arise from this event.

## Some of our media articles covered this Quarter


**VoiceAbility**

### News and blog posts: policy news (Scotland)

We shared 1 article about an independent review of the Scotland Adult Disability Payment taking an inclusive and transparent engagement approach with stakeholders.

- It had **571 views** in August (posted 6 August)
- [Scotland Adult Disability Payment: an independent review](#)

There will be opportunities for people to contribute throughout the review. Although anyone can respond, the call for evidence is primarily intended for organisations, and VoiceAbility will be responding.



**VoiceAbility**

### Media coverage (Scotland)


- VoiceAbility was featured by **16 UK media titles** in August, raising awareness of our benefits advocacy service in Scotland, and new advocacy services in Essex and Wolverhampton
- A [Daily Record article about urging people with cancer to check if they are eligible for disability benefits](#) included a mention of our benefits advocacy service in Scotland from Shirley-Anne Somerville, the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice
- The opening of a pop-up shop in Dumfries to promote the service has featured in the [Dumfries Courier](#) (page 3 of the print edition) and [Dumfries & Galloway! What's Going On?](#)

**VoiceAbility**


### News and blog posts: policy news (Scotland)

We shared 3 articles focused on Scottish Government updates.


- [What is Short-term Assistance?](#) had **93 views** in September (posted 25 September)
- [The first 'Programme for Government' for the Scottish Parliament](#) had **60 views** in September (posted 24 September)
- [Scotland Carers Support Payment to go nationwide](#) had **119 views** in September (posted 20 September)



**What is Short-term Assistance?**  
A temporary payment that provides financial support when challenging a Social Security Scotland decision.



**The first 'Programme for Government' for the Scottish Parliament**  
First Minister John Swinney announced his first Programme for Government (PFG).



**Scotland Carers Support Payment to go nationwide**  
The Scottish Government will soon be making a new Carer Support Payment available nationwide.

## Successes

Our very first pop-up shop proved to be a success. We looked to trial something different to raise awareness. Due to the success, we will look to replicate across Scotland.

### VoiceAbility

#### News and blog posts: benefits advocacy (Scotland)

We shared 1 article about the launch of our first Scottish benefits advocacy pop-up shop in Dumfries.

- It had **49 views** in September (posted 17 September)
- [First Scottish benefits advocacy pop-up shop hailed 'a real success'](#)

**“I feel the pop-up shop was a real success considering it's the first time we've done this, and we plan to do more in the future.”**



**First Scottish benefits advocacy pop-up shop hailed 'a real success'**  
VoiceAbility's first pop-up shop — set up to promote our Scottish benefits advocacy service — has been hailed "a real success".

# Report

## 1. Key Performance Indicators:

### 1.1 KPI Summary

FY25 Q2			
No	Key Performance Indicator	Milestone	Result
1	All requests for support received must be processed and allocated to appropriate advocacy representation within 2 working days.	95%	97%
2	Initial appointments with Individuals should be arranged within 3 working days of the referral to the advocacy worker or service partner	95%	98%
3	Acknowledge receipt of complaint/concern within 2 working days of receipt and provide a formal response within 5 working days of receipt (copied to the SG contract manager for information).	90%	N/A
4	Any complaints which cannot be resolved by Service provider regarding the system or services must be sent to SG contract manager within 6 working days of receipt.	90%	N/A
5	Serious issues to be escalated to the Scottish Government within 24 hours	100%	N/A
6	Service Provider must issue satisfaction survey to 100% of Individuals within two days of their service requirements ending	95%	100%
7	Service Provider must make payment to any sub-contractors within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice	100%	N/A

## 2.Call Centre Key Performance Indicators

### 2.1 Call Centre KPI Summary

		Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24
Social Security	Number of Phone calls received	370	308	244
	% of calls answered within 20 seconds	82.97%	90.49%	77.50%
	% of calls missed	5%	2%	5%
	Ave wait time before drop off	2 mins 43	3 mins 11	4 mins 1



Unfortunately, last month we were hit with sickness within the Contact Centre, leaving us short on staff. This coupled with annual leave and the training of two new RIAs in Scotland. We are pleased that we are back to our full quota of 4 RIAs in Scotland.

### 3. Individuals (Advocacy Partners)

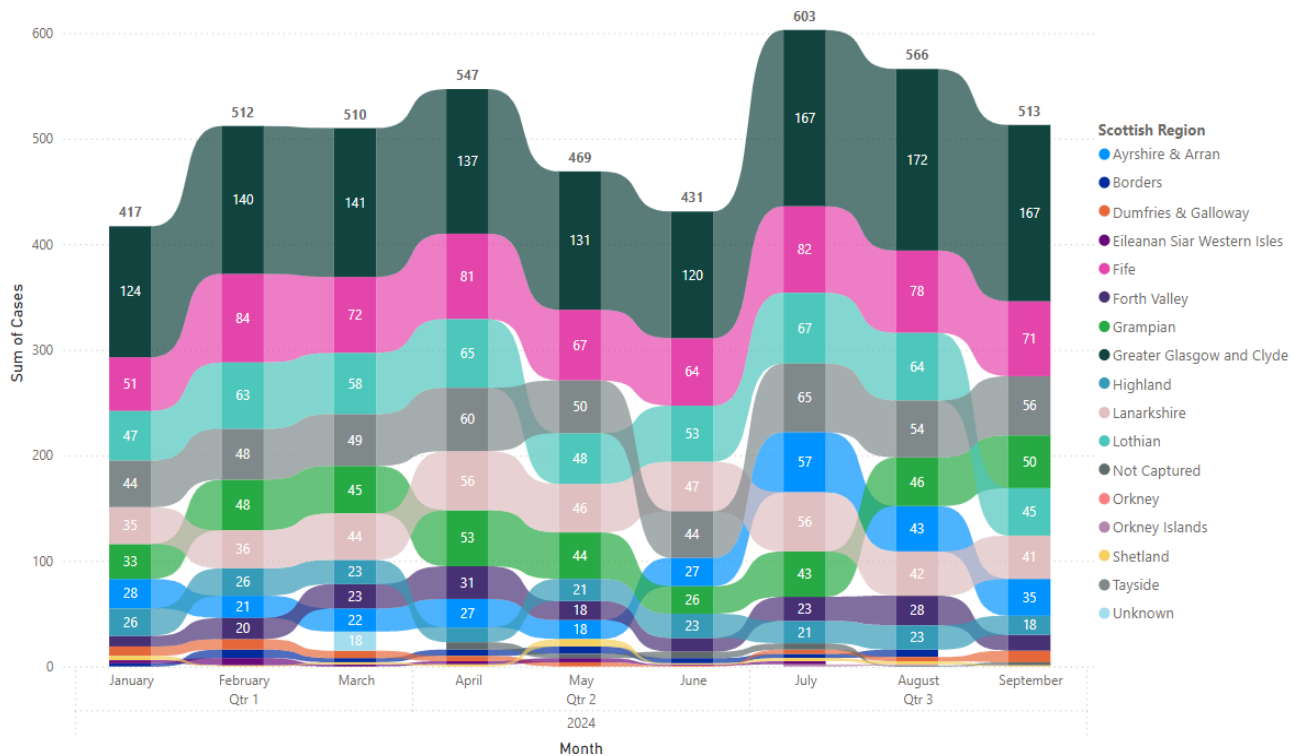
#### 3.1 The Number of Advocacy partners Supported.

In FYR25 Q2, VoiceAbility received 1,682 cases, this is a 17% increase compared to Q1, we opened case for 1,576 unique Advocacy Partners. In July we reached a new record with 603 cases. 64% of all cases for the quarter were for Applications which is the biggest increase compared to 58% of cases being for applications in Q1.

Cases breakdown	Referral Sub-Type	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Grand Total
<b>Social Security Scotland referred cases</b>	1st Tier Tribunal	3	9	6	18
	Application	34	35	19	88
	Determination	16	13	4	33
	Re-determination	39	23	21	83
	Upper Tier Tribunal			1	1
<b>Social Security Scotland referred cases Total</b>		<b>92</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>Other referral sources</b>	1st Tier Tribunal	28	37	32	97
	Application	351	316	292	959
	Determination	44	42	36	122
	Re-determination	86	89	101	276
	Upper Tier Tribunal	2	2	1	5
<b>Other referral sources Total</b>		<b>511</b>	<b>486</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>1459</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>603</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>513</b>	<b>1682</b>

Below you can see the cases by location for last quarter and this Q2 report with the percent of where the cases were for the quarter.

[Sum of Cases by month for 2024 to date by region](#)

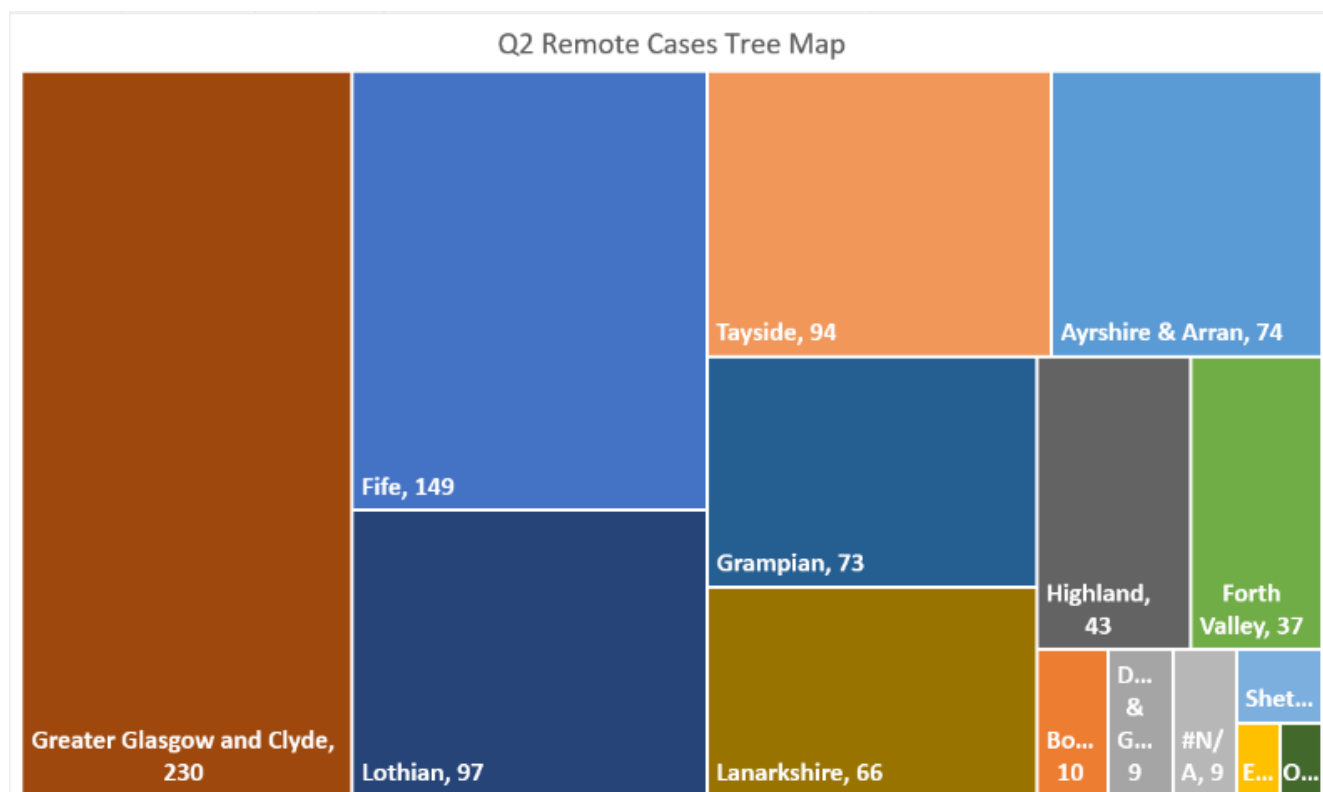


In Q2, we have seen an increase of cases from Greater Glasgow which has risen from 27% of all cases to now 30% in quarter 2 with 507 cases. The biggest increase in cases for the quarter by area have been seen in Dumfries and Galloway (90% Increase) and Ayrshire & Arran (88% Increase) with the largest decreases seen in Eileanan Siar Western Isles 63% decrease and a 39% decrease in Borders.

The increase from Dumfries and Galloway would have been down to the success of our pop-up shop.

We have to give thanks to our Advocate Moira in Ayrshire who has recently built a successful relationship with Compass, South Ayrshire. Moira is working out of the centre one day a week, working closely with the key workers. We are in talks of increasing the number of days due to a high number of referrals engaging on service. We have successfully supported 13 advocacy partners through initial application and the numbers are growing.

Scottish Region	Qtr 1 2025	Qtr 2 2025	% allocation to region for Q2 2025
Greater Glasgow and Clyde	388	507	30%
Fife	212	231	14%
Lothian	166	176	10%
Tayside	154	175	10%
Grampian	123	139	8%
Lanarkshire	149	138	8%
Ayrshire & Arran	72	135	8%
Forth Valley	62	66	4%
Highland	58	62	4%
Dumfries & Galloway	10	19	1%
Borders	18	11	1%
Not Captured	5	10	1%
Shetland	10	7	0%
Eileanan Siar Western Isles	8	3	0%
Orkney Islands		3	0%
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>1,435</b>	<b>1,682</b>	<b>100%</b>



### 3.2 Partnerships

Women's Guild – One of our advocates presented to the group. Event was attended by the local councillor Mo and the Depute Lord Provost of Hamilton who both promised to signpost.

Lanarkshire Mosque, Lanarkshire Muslim Welfare Society – drop in provided by team and also just setting up attending the women's support group at the mosque every month.

We continue to work closely with Castle Huntly around providing a service. This is currently ongoing and should hopefully be up and running soon. This has taken time to develop due to the restrictions that have to be in place around security. Castle Huntly prison – meeting held and partnership agreement now in place – they have our digital material, and our ad runs on their link centre screen. Starting in November.

This is another breakthrough for the team. One of our advocates made great connections with the Stirling Welfare Team. We were recently invited along to their team meeting, and we presented to the team about our service. We had the opportunity to share information on how we can signpost to their service. The Welfare team advised that they have previously made referrals to our service and would continue to do so and look forward to working in partnership. We also felt during this meeting due to conversations had that as we deliver advocacy, we would support the client to tribunal level regardless of the points from the initial application.

Two of our advocates continue to develop relationships with Marie Curie and have been invited along to their breakfast mornings. Marie Curie have expressed that they are keen to work in partnership.

Brain Health and Dementia Resource Centre in Perth – morning sessions at the dementia café. They are delivering a local support programme for individual's families and carers living with dementia and/or those concerned with brain health. They are keen to incorporate education, drop ins, information sessions and other activities. We will look to set up a drop in.

This quarter we looked to re-gain some focus on CDP referrals. Due to the number of applications being received under ADP, time was limited. Below we have named a few organisations we contacted.

Cottage Family Centre, Fife, Homestart, Paediatric outpatient team at the Queen Margaret Hospital and the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital, Women's Aid and how we can support them and their children.

We attended Coatbridge Hub Parent's Day to raise awareness of CDP and have been in contact with the Fir Park Link Worker along with distributing volunteer posters at Tact Hall.

We contacted the specialist provision schools for children with complex health care needs. Calaiswood and Duloch schools who have advised that they will add our information to their Facebook page.

Downs Syndrome Scotland have expressed their interest in hearing about our service and have invited VoiceAbility to attend a virtual coffee morning in the coming months to meet the team, parents/carers and children who use the service.

Local health visitors are looking at how we can promote this throughout NHS Fife.

Reached out to Fife Council children's services to offer to go along and speak about our service.

Enable (Enable support individuals from 16-21 who have learning difficulties).

Attended a coffee morning with Sense Scot early years and gave a presentation on VoiceAbility to parents and careers present. Agreed to keep in touch and share resources in the future.

We have continued to build upon relationships with the Action for Children centre in Tullibody with a focus on raising awareness of CDP. We hold regular drop-in clinics at the centre and will respond and attend on additional dates if needed.

During a meeting held with our operations manager and staff at Improving Lives to discuss our partnership and what we can do to support more residents to engage with our services. We discussed a potential drop in to promote Child Disability Payment. We immediately looked to set up a date, which went ahead Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> August. Due to the success, we will look to hold further events.

***Our Info Day gave our local community the chance to meet the Voiceability advocates who are available in our premises 5 days a week. Families were able to find out about Child Disability Payment.***

***People brought their kids along too and received a free goodie bag and they got to try out a special kids-only session of our Art for Anxiety group***



All our work is coming to fruition on CDP – please see table below.

Years (Opened Date)	Quarters (Opened Date)	Months (Opened Date)	Total
2022	Qtr1		7
	Qtr2		8
	Qtr3		8
	Qtr4		20
2023	Qtr1		34
	Qtr2		47
	Qtr3		47
	Qtr4		76
2024	Qtr1		100
	Qtr2		79
	Qtr3		88
Grand Total			514

### 3.3 Equality Act Statistics

The full breakdown of Equality Act statistic can be found in 'Equal Ops' tab in the attached FY24/25 Q2 Data Report. This quarter we have seen Mental Health cases remain the highest support need, a summary of some of the more noteworthy information can be seen below.

#### Top 4 Support Needs

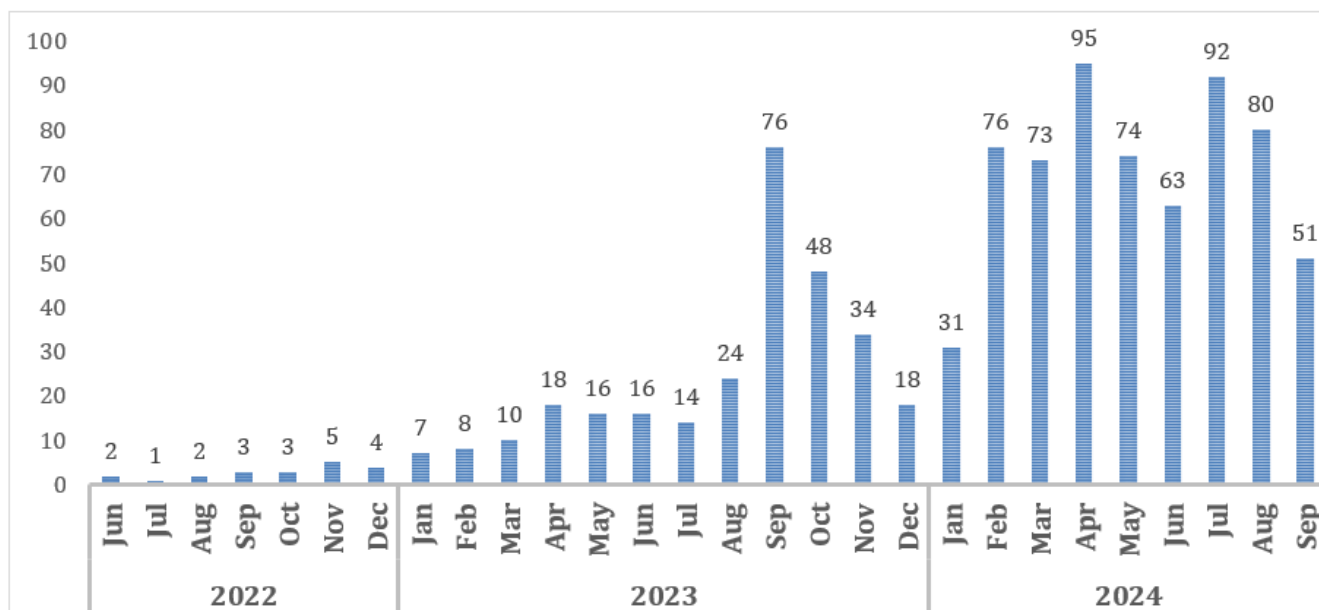
- Mental Health (30%)
- Long-Term Health Conditions (24%)
- Physical Disability (17%)
- Autistic spectrum diagnosis (7%)

#### Age Breakdown

- 50 – 64 (36%)
- 25 – 49 (43%)
- 18 – 24 (9%)

## 4.2 Referring Agencies and Organisations

### Agency referrals by Month and year to date



For the quarter we have identified that out of the 223 cases referred by Social Security Scotland, Greater Glasgow and Clyde, was the top region for referrals (22%). Please see table below for a full breakdown of the cases by NHS Board:

Scottish Region	Jul - 24	Aug- 24	Sep - 24	Grand Total
Greater Glasgow and Clyde	16	15	17	48
Lothian	18	11	6	35
Lanarkshire	17	10	7	34
Fife	9	11	4	24
Ayrshire & Arran	7	11	4	22
Grampian	8	5	6	19
Tayside	7	6	3	16
Forth Valley	4	7	1	12
Highland	3		2	5
Dumfries & Galloway	1	2		3
Information Not Captured	1		1	2
Borders		1		1
Orkney Islands		1		1
Shetland	1			1
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>223</b>

## 5. Service Administration

### 5.1 Feedback and Complaints

#### Quotes from clients:

***“The person that dealt with me was very good and made me feel at ease , I would never have completed this form without the help, thank you”***

***“Grace was a joy to meet with and both her knowledge and warmth made the process exceptionally easy.”***

***“Complete understanding of our situation. Good clear conversation & also willing to spend time explaining what would happen in the process”***

***“Rob showed an exceptional level of empathy and diligence, giving me plenty of time to explore how my disability affects me in every aspect asked by the form. He also has the tenacity to ask the hard questions that you don't want to face about how the level of disability is changing. I believe that through his empathy and intelligence he was able to put as accurate a description as possible in the incredibly artificial construct of disability that is within the form. He did this with good humour which is quite a feat as the process is deeply upsetting. He has a tremendous skill set and should be acknowledged for his depth of commitment. Thank you Rob.”***

***“Miła kompetentna, wszystko wyjaśnione jasno”- Translated ( Nice, competent, everything explained clearly)***

***“The female who came to support me was excellent. She went above and beyond to help me with my form. She was very knowledgeable and there was no judgement at all. She was kind, fair and very supportive. She never once looked at the clock and made sure everything was completely finished and accurate before she finished. At the end of our meeting, it felt as if I had known this person for a while. I really thank her so much for her support.”***

### 5.2 Concerns

VoiceAbility advocates are still experiencing some concerns whilst attending The Chamber with our advocacy partners regarding their 1<sup>st</sup> Tier Tribunal. This has been reported back to Scottish Government and we are continuing to provide factual evidence. Not being able to support our advocacy partners during this process has been so stressful for them, some highlighting that they are wishing to put forward a complaint.



## 6. Staffing

### 6.1 Staffing

- 1 Operations Manager
- 1 Contract Manager
- 4 Team Leaders
- 55 Advocates
- 4 Referral/Information Advocates

## 7. Social Value

### 7.1 Evidence of Community Benefits

#### **Charity Fair – Peterhead Academy**

On Monday 26<sup>th</sup> August and Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> September one of our Advocates attended a charity fair that we were invited along to at Peterhead Academy, this was part of the school's curriculum for the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (**YPI**) They had a list of questions to ask organisations in attendance.

At both of these morning events, the students showed great interest in approaching the stall we had set up in finding out information about VoiceAbility and more so in depth about the impact we have in the local communities across North Aberdeenshire. The advocate spent a lot of time providing an overview of the impact and demand which has significantly grown since appointed into post. Expressing a lot of individuals we work with are often vulnerable and we are making sure they feel empowered throughout the process and their voice is being heard when it matters the most.

A lot of the students expressed they could see the importance of why VoiceAbility is here and voiced they are glad to know of the services and feel for some of them there could be personal reasons of why they would reach out.

Following the event, a group of students have reached out to inform us that they would like to focus on VoiceAbility as the charity for their YPI project.

Please see email received –

***“ Good afternoon, Callum***

***I wanted to let you know that me and my friend are interested in your charity and we would like to focus on it for our YPI class. We met you last week and you did tell us that you do not have an office but we would still like to arrange a meeting whether it is at our school (Peterhead Academy) or at your preferred location. Thank you very much”***

Through discussion it has been agreed with the students and one of our hubs that they are going to attend on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> September.

Our Operations Manager attended an event recently where she met up with staff who were promoting MCR Pathways – Become a Mentor an hour a week. This was shared with all staff across Scotland and we have a number of advocates who are now or are awaiting the opportunity to take up this marvellous opportunity in their local area.

MCR Pathways is a national, award-winning volunteer mentoring charity. Established in 2007, our vision is for all young people to have an equality of educational outcomes, career opportunities and life chances.

Our Advocates attended a session with the Strategic Planning and Commissioning Officer – Older People within the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership and PC Yocksan Bell on a very important subject relating to raising the awareness of the Herbert Protocol.

### **Here are some things you can do to help:**

- Spread the word to family and friends
- Raise awareness to people living with dementia and their families you may be working with and encourage to use where needed
- Think about how you can include in your day to day work processes and procedures to increase uptake. The form is also a useful tool for gathering information for life story and reminiscence work.
- Use the presentation attached and adjust as needed to give a presentation to colleagues and local groups
- Share information about the Herbert Protocol on your social media channels.
- 

There is a Herbert Protocol communications toolkit that has suggested social media and web content. This is available on the Focus on Dementia webpage at <https://ihub.scot/improvement-programmes/focus-on-dementia/herbert-protocol-national-launch/> and also Health and Social Care Scotland <https://hscscotland.scot/media/news/the-herbert-protocol-safe-and-found.html>.

### **Volunteers**

To say thank you for all of your hard work volunteering this year we have arranged tickets to the Castle of Light event at Edinburgh Castle.

Historic Environment Scotland who run the event have offered free entry for you all as they recognise and appreciate the work that volunteers do in the community - as do all of us at VoiceAbility!

The time slot is 6<sup>th</sup> December 6:30pm. It takes around 45 minutes to walk through. There are food and drink stalls at the venue as well.

## **8. Safeguarding & Governance**

This quarter we have identified and raised 18 safeguarding concerns. We can confirm that 16 of these have been closed due to local authority advising they have taken the case on. And 2 are Concern Raised pending response.