

Let's Talk about Power of Attorney

A Review of the Midlothian Awareness Month during November 2016

Executive Summary

The Project:

A power of Attorney (POA) is a legal document which appoints someone to act for you if you become unable to make decisions or manage your own affairs, however you can only grant a Power of Attorney whilst you still have capacity to understand how it works and what powers you are granting.

During 2015 the Carers Planning Officer for Midlothian Council gave a presentation to the Midlothian Financial Inclusion Network (MFIN) about concerns around the increase in the number of Guardianship Orders that the Council were required to apply for because so many older people and those affected by dementia did not have a POA in place before they lost capacity. It was agreed that MFIN would plan a campaign to increase awareness of POA among older people and their carers in Midlothian and funding for this was successfully sought from the Council's Small Grants Scheme with match funding awarded by the Robertson Trust.

Aims:

1. To work with partners and other stakeholders, particularly older people and their carers to co-produce information resources to increase awareness of the benefits of POA to older people and their carers and to provide information about how to get advice regarding granting a POA.
2. To run a local POA campaign to improve access to advice and affordable legal help for older people and their carers, working with local solicitors to offer free or discounted POA services during a Midlothian POA Awareness Month.

Raising Awareness – Getting our Message Across to Older People in Midlothian:

- Approximately 85-90 older people participated in discussions to inform the development of information materials for the project.
- A month long campaign to promote awareness of POA among older people and their carers in Midlothian took place during November 2016.
- The POA Project Officer delivered ten awareness raising talks to groups of older people and spoke at two professional team meeting to provide information about POA and to encourage engagement with the POA Awareness Month
- Twenty eight telephone and email enquiries requesting further information about POA were responded to by the project officer during the POA awareness month
- Approximately 2500 printed POA information guides/leaflets were circulated to older people via a wide range of organisations, services and groups.
- Media coverage of the POA Awareness month included 3 published articles (1 in a Midlothian-wide local newspaper, 1 in the Health and Social Care Partnership autumn newsletter and 1 in the Vocal Carers' Newsletter), a live interview was broadcast on local radio (Diamond FM) at the start of the November awareness month, with social media posts reaching a targeted audience of over 3000.
- Fourteen local solicitor firms supported the POA Awareness Month and their details were listed in our POA guide with many of them offering discounts on their POA services during November 2016.

Project Outcomes

What Worked Well

- In the region of 200 older people attended POA information awareness sessions/talks.
- Around 60 enquiries were received by the participating solicitor firms and as many as 30 POA documents were set up for Midlothian residents by these solicitors, whilst a number of other older people opted to use their own solicitor or Vocal to help make a POA.
- A free POA legal Advice Surgery successfully took place in one the local sheltered housing schemes resulting in seven tenants setting up their own POA.
- The project steering group included staff from the Health and Social Care Partnership, VOCAL, Midlothian Council Solicitor, NHS Lothian and MFIN with different perspectives guiding the project.
- A paid for sponsored targeted post on Facebook, which reached over 3000 older (50+) Facebook users in Midlothian, proved to be low-cost method for spreading information to a targeted audience.
- Links were established with a number of solicitor firms with most of the solicitors who become involved offering discounts to Midlothian residents during the awareness month.
- Access to affordable legal help with POA for pensioners with limited savings was improved by publicising the more generous financial thresholds for Legal Aid available to pensioners.

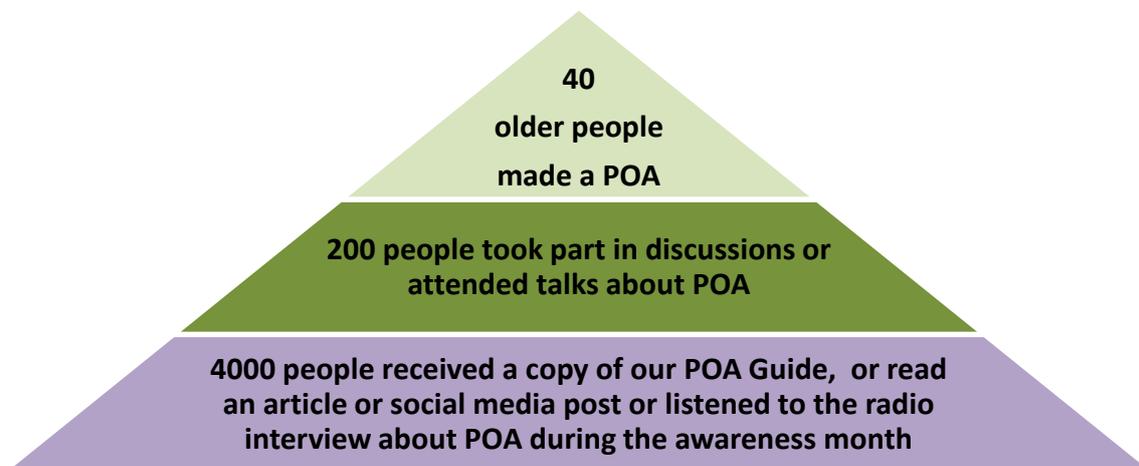
The Challenges and what we learnt from them

- Older people often have concerns and questions which need to be answered before they are confident POA is a good option for them, therefore during future POA awareness campaigns we will aim to provide more solicitor-led free POA advice sessions.
- The financial cost of setting up POA is a barrier for many people. However agencies supporting older people are often not aware of financial help is available to many pensioners via the Legal Aid Advice and Assistance Scheme. It may be helpful to produce a guide for staff providing information about POA, financial thresholds for Legal Aid and how to signpost older people to solicitors registered with Legal Aid scheme for POA work.
- Although we contacted local nursing and care homes and sent information to them to distribute to their residents they had very limited engagement with the POA awareness month. Before planning further awareness campaigns we need to seek the views of care/nursing home managers of how best to work with them to ensure we reach any of their residents who would benefit from information and advice about POA.

Next Steps – Priorities for future work

- Produce a guide to POA for advice and support agencies encouraging screening for eligibility for Legal Aid and signposting to Legal Aid solicitors.
- Future awareness campaigns to also include other groups such as young disabled people in transition to adult services, and to provide information about alternative options such as Appointee-ship and Guardianship Orders.
- Information about how to manage a Power of Attorney could also be useful for those acting as Attorney.

Diagram: Estimated Reach of the Midlothian POA Awareness Month



For further information please contact Penny Stafford at MFIN by email at mfin.penny@outlook.com