**The Voice – A Lived/Living Experience Panel**

MHAP has successfully offered Independent Advocacy (Individual and Collective) in West Lothian for nearly 30 years. We have facilitated the West Lothian Mental Health Service Users Forum for over 25 years, engaging participants with lived/living experience of mental health problems in collective work.

In 2019, MHAP was given an award for 3 years from the Scottish Government to develop a further collective forum in West Lothian for people with lived/living experience of addictions, now known as The Voice. Our Forums provide a supported structure for groups to have their collective voices and opinions heard as part of MHAP’s commitment to challenging inequality and stigma and influencing policy.

For the past 7 years we have also been commissioned by the West Lothian Alcohol and Drug Partnership (WL ADP) to provide individual advocacy for people with lived/living experience of addictions. Then in 2022 MHAP were successful in securing a further award from WL ADP to host a lived and living experience panel.

The panel will feed in to the work of West Lothian ADP including supporting the consultation of strategic work such as the new strategic commissioning plan and support feedback on current services. This panel should feed into the new National Collaborative to ensure the views of people with lived and living experience are reflected in all aspects of the national mission. It is anticipated that the panel itself will set the agenda and may wish to raise with the ADP and other bodies, issues raised to support those with drug and alcohol problems.

This award allows MHAP to continue operating The Voice and fulfil the role of a “panel” which would bring equity of Collective Independent Advocacy services for both client groups in West Lothian and continue to offer those with lived and living experience of addictions to participate, share their views and opinions and be heard.

MHAP anticipates that the Panel will function in a similar way to the West Lothian Service Users Forum and a dedicated advocacy worker will support the panel by:

* Facilitating and recording meetings.
* Gathering the views and opinions of all involved and sharing on behalf of the panel with appropriate services/WL ADP.
* Enabling participants to communicate their views and opinions.
* Raising any collective issues with appropriate service providers.
* Supporting panel members to attend conferences, meetings, relevant events.
* Supporting engagement with the National Collaborative.
* Signposting participants to individual advocacy if needed.
* Coordinating service users’ responses to issues and forward them to relevant organisations.
* Inviting visitors to provide information about services at the request of forum members.
* Providing an opportunity for services to consult with the Panel.
* Keeping Panel members up to date with local and national addiction developments and policies to assist participants to make informed decisions and forward their responses.
* Raising awareness of the Panel and encouraging participation.