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Contract for charity that gives the vulnerable a voice

A charity has been awarded a two-year government contract to help give vulnerable islanders with mental health issues a voice.

My Voice Jersey, an independent advocacy charity, works with adults and children who are severely affected by mental illness or who lack capacity. The organisation offers a range of support such as ensuring the legal and human rights of islanders are respected, as well as making sure those affected feel listened to, that their views and wishes are fully considered, and that they are able to participate as far as possible in decision-making about their care or treatment.

The Capacity and Self Determination Law, which came into force last October, established a set of legal principles to empower people who lack capacity to make decisions. The guidelines make it a legal requirement for service providers to ensure that people with a severe mental illness or who lack capacity have access to someone who can act as an independent advocate on their behalf.

In the last three months My Voice Jersey has seen up to 100 individuals including in-patients with acute mental health issues, children and young people, and older adults. Once a person makes initial contact with the team by either phone or email, the advocate assesses where best to meet according to the client's individual needs. The team, which started its two-year contract in January, has now launched a website (<https://myvoice.org.je>) describing the advice and support it offers, and how to access its services.

Patricia Winchester, chief executive of My Voice Jersey who campaigned for major changes to the Mental Health law and for the introduction of a new Capacity Law, said: "We are a specialist service dedicated to looking out for the most vulnerable, the least able to stand up for themselves. Our role is entirely confidential. We work with people to give them information so that they can, as much as possible, make informed choices.

"It's about supporting people with significant mental health problems to make sure their rights are protected and they are treated with dignity and respect. Our role is to empower the disempowered."

Health and Community Services Minister Deputy Richard Renouf said: "I am delighted that My Voice Jersey has been awarded this contract. This charity offers a vital service giving vulnerable islanders a voice during their time of greatest need."