



Human rights for all. © Dianne Wittner.

MDAC Friends' Brief

January/February
2016

Inside

MDAC's 2016
Advocacy opportunities

2

MDAC's 2016
Litigation opportunities

3

Slovenia: institution visit

4

Fact file:
Victoria Macdonald

5

Fact file:
Edwin Rekosh

6

Who's at MDAC?

7

Welcome to the January & February Friends' Brief

Welcome to the combined January and February edition of the Friends' Brief. In the December edition we showcased our 2015 impact. We held our annual Christmas appeal in December, which raised £18,905. Thank you for contributing!

So what's in store in this edition of the Friends' Brief? Steven Allen our Campaigns Director provides an update on the advocacy opportunities on page 2. On the next page Ann Campbell our Litigation Director outlines the litigation opportunities that we will be pursuing over the course of this year. On page 4, you can read an article by Anna Zeller, a Project Manager who visited a psychiatric institution in Slovenia in December. On pages 5 and 6 you can read about two new Trustees, Victoria Macdonald and Ed Rekosh. Betti Nagy, our Finance and Administration Director, is in the hot seat in our 'who's at MDAC?' column this month.

If you would like to meet in London, please let me know.

Best wishes,

Oliver



MDAC advocacy plans

Steven Allen,
Campaigns Director

January's European Parliamentary hearing. © Inclusion Europe.

Just over a month into 2016 and we're already full swing here at MDAC.

In January, I attended a European Parliamentary hearing in Brussels on the rights of people with disabilities. The hearing, organised by Belgian MEP Helga Stevens, was billed as an opportunity for civil society to input on a cross-Parliamentary report on how to strengthen implementation of the UN disability rights convention across the Union. Once again, we put forward the issue of the large-scale mispending of millions of Euros to segregate people with disabilities – and it appeared that the issue started to get on the agenda across the political divides. I hope to bring you more details over the coming months.

We kicked off a new project this year which will focus on gaining justice for children with mental disabilities who have their human rights violated in Europe. The project, which will provide training to lawyers in nine European countries, aims to significantly

significantly increase the expertise of the legal sector in tackling issues including long-term institutionalisation, the denial of inclusive education, and other forms of abuse which disproportionately affect children with disabilities. The project builds on our [access to justice](#) project which we completed last year, and which showed that courts and lawyers are often ill-equipped to protect children with disabilities against some of the most serious forms of abuse and ill-treatment.

This project will hopefully better equip lawyers to fight for the causes MDAC promote. It comes at a time when such advocacy is much needed: the global adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) maybe at an all time high – with Belarus signing up last September taking the total number of countries up to 161 – nevertheless, we continue to find that many governments have still not made the law and policy reforms that are required to close the gap between rights rhetoric and reality. That is why we take a proactive approach and help people take cases to court, to create pressure so that governments do the right thing.



MDAC's Ugandan client, Aidhah Namulindwa. © LAPD.

MDAC strategic litigation plans

Ann Campbell,
Litigation Director

2016 promises to be a dynamic and exciting year for MDAC's litigation team. In addition to the 35 cases we are currently litigating across nine countries, we plan to substantially increase our potential for impact by initiating at least 10 new cases in Europe and Africa.

Thanks in large part to a grant of £60,000 from the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, we are able to strengthen our litigation strategy under our 'My Home, My Choice' campaign by focusing on the most atrocious forms of human rights violations to which people with intellectual disabilities and people with psycho-social disabilities are subjected.

We plan to litigate cases on physical and mental abuse, denial of healthcare on the basis of disability, and coercive medical interventions that have a seriously negative effect. In December 2015 we held a colloquium in Budapest for our lawyers from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Moldova and Slovakia to develop litigation plans for 2016. We discussed the challenges in identifying victims of torture and ill-treatment and came up with innovative ways to increase the outreach we are doing to potential victims.

Moreover, as some of you may remember, MDAC has undertaken research in [Africa](#), highlighting some of the more serious violations of human rights, including the right to be free from torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, the right to live in the community and the right to legal capacity. This year we will develop litigation in Kenya and Zambia and launch additional cases in Uganda, all with a view to ensuring individuals get remedies they deserve, and to nudge those countries to improve their laws and policies so that many thousands of other people can have better lives.

In our "I'm a Person" campaign we challenge guardianship regimes and encourage States to adopt more humane forms of supporting people to be the authors of their own lives. We will continue litigating guardianship cases in Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Russia.

In our "Schools for All" campaign, we are fighting for inclusive education so that all children - regardless of their labels of ability or disability - learn together in a common learning environment. We will be working with DLA Piper and Vodafone and NGOs in each country to bring test cases in Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the UK.



Hrastovec Social Care Institution, Slovenia. © MDAC.

Why this Slovenian institution should close

Anna Zeller,
Project Manager

In December, MDAC's staff, along with Slovenian colleagues, visited the Hrastovec Social Care Institution - Slovenia's largest residential facility for people with mental health issues and multiple disabilities situated nearby a town called Maribor. The purpose of our announced one-day visit was to examine the circumstances and witness the everyday life of residents in a large-scale institution in Central Europe, including monitoring the treatment of the residents and the use of different forms of restraint.

Hrastovec is one example of the many old castles which are used as social care institutions to segregate people with disabilities from the society, which are currently in existence in central and eastern Europe. The huge building houses 480 people with a wide range of mental health issues from the age of 18 to 90: some of the inhabitants are under guardianship regimes which means they have no legal authority to leave. Those who are able to move out and live in the community through an independent living arrangement or to a group home are often transferred back to the institution after a while because of the lack of support services available that would help manage their life in the event, for example, they became ill.

Although the closing of the institution has been on the agenda for 15 years and the number of community living arrangements in the neighbourhood has significantly increased in the recent past, it is still unlikely that Hrastovec will be shut down in the near future, as it is the only social care home in the country that is ready to take care of those people whose treatment, because of their severe behavioural patterns, would be a real challenge for existing alternative care facilities. Thus, residents of Hrastovec will continue to be deprived of their liberty, routinely being subjected to degrading treatment, like being placed in padded seclusion rooms or having medical and physical restraints imposed on them against their will.

International human rights law sets out how each person with a disability - including a mental health issue - has the right to live in the community. Institutions like Hrastovec fly in the face of these obligations, as they warehouse people until they die. Hence, it's time for the Government of Slovenia to step up to the plate and fulfill these international legal obligations, in the interests of protecting the autonomy and dignity of people with disabilities.



Victoria Macdonald. © Channel4.com.

New MDAC Trustee:

Victoria Macdonald

What does Victoria do?

Victoria is an award-winning journalist and Health and Social Care Correspondent for Channel 4 News in the UK. Victoria is originally from New Zealand and previously worked for the Sunday Telegraph.

What experience does Victoria bring to MDAC?

Victoria's interest in mental health and disability has been longstanding. She has covered [neglect of people with learning disabilities](#), especially the failure of the health system to treat them adequately, leading to higher death rates at a disproportionately earlier age. She has also reported on the impact of welfare reforms on people with physical disabilities and on people with autism being locked up into secure mental health units, hundreds of miles from their families. Victoria has twice been a judge and award-winner in the [Mind Media Awards](#).

Victoria says:



There is so much to be done to give people with learning disabilities and those with mental health problems access to health services, education and to be treated with humanity, dignity and compassion. I am hugely excited to be working with a charity which has that vision."





Edwin Rekosh. Source: linkedin.com.

New MDAC Trustee:

Edwin Rekosh

What does Edwin do?

Edwin (known as 'Ed') founded [PILnet: The Global Network for Public Interest Law](#) in 1997 and was its President and CEO until 2015. He continues to serve the organization as a senior advisor as he works on developing new solutions to address the closing space for civil society around the world. PILnet connects and equips lawyers to protect human rights, advance social justice and defend the most vulnerable.

What experience does Edwin bring to MDAC?

Prior to founding PILnet, Ed consulted for the Ford Foundation, worked for the International Human Rights Law Group (now Global Rights), practiced law at Coudert Brothers and co-founded the Human Rights Watch Film Festival. Ed has written and spoken extensively about human rights and the rule of law, and he received the American Bar Association's International Human Rights Award in 2009. He is a graduate of Cornell University and Columbia Law School where he is a [Lecturer](#).

Edwin says:

“

MDAC, through its creative and diligent use of legal advocacy, has made a critical difference in the lives of one the most vulnerable populations in the world. I am proud to serve on the board of such an important and effective organization, especially at a time when it is poised to build strength upon strength.

”



Betti Nagy. © MDAC.

Who's at MDAC?

The same questions to different people.

This month: **Betti Nagy**

What's your name and where are you from?

My name is Erzsébet Nagy, but most people refer to me as 'Betti' which is pronounced with a double 't'. I am from a small town in the south east of Hungary.

What do you do for MDAC?

I have been working for MDAC for almost five years now as Finance and Administration Director. I help with financial planning, write budgets for the organisation and for grant applications, supply financial information to donors and my colleagues about income and expenditure, supervise the accounting and office operations, as well as having responsibility for human resources.

Why do you do what you do?

I like working with figures and maths as there is always a solution to the problem which is quantifiable. I also enjoy the fact that the tables I produce give very concrete and transparent information which enables me to assess the financial needs and capabilities of MDAC. Moreover, I take a keen interest in human rights and mental health matters, which stems from my

experiences as a teenager and young adult, having cared for a close family member who had a psycho-social disability.

What's the most interesting thing MDAC does?

One of the things I find most interesting about the activities MDAC carries out is the regular visits to psychiatric institutions all around the world, where my colleagues meet people who are involuntarily detained in often degrading and harsh conditions — taking action at various courts, and bodies as important as the UN, in attempt to try and effect change.

Furthermore, I find it fascinating to learn from my colleagues as to how people with intellectual disabilities and psycho-social disabilities can be integrated in to the community—something that is a new concept in Hungary, with it being an issue that was routinely ignored in the past.

What do you do in your spare time?

I read, exercise, learn country music on my acoustic guitar, and spend time with my family.

In three words, what is MDAC?

A great cause.

News flash

Here are some developments in the global mental disability rights field that relate to the work MDAC carries out:

Schools for All

[Inclusion Europe's submission to the Draft General Comment No 4 on Article 24](#) (Inclusion Europe)

[Human Rights Watch's submission to the Draft General Comment No 4 on Article 24](#) (Human Rights Watch)

[Bulgaria: not enough progress made on social rights of people with disabilities](#) (MDAC)

I'm a Person

[Women with intellectual disability fights for her autonomy at European Court](#) (MDAC)

[Poland: rape victim with intellectual disability fights for justice in Strasbourg](#) (MDAC)

My Home, My Choice

[Czech Republic: violence against women with disabilities and high rates of institutionalisation must be tackled](#) (MDAC)

[Regional African treaty has potential to "strengthen implementation" of disability rights on the continent](#) (MDAC)

Volunteer position available with MDAC:

Board of Trustees - Secretary

Brief role description:

A: Compliance with law and best practice

1. Report to the Board so as to ensure the organisation's compliance with its Memorandum and Articles of Association, charity law, company law and any other relevant legislation or regulations.
2. Act as MDAC's company secretary, executing legal documents for the charity authorised by the Board of Trustees.

B: Organise Board Meetings

1. Prepare agendas in consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair, heads of Board Committees (Currently Finance and Development) and CEO.
2. Circulate agendas and supporting papers two weeks in advance.
3. Check that a quorum is present.

How to apply

Please send a CV and cover letter to JoinTheTeam@mdac.org . You can read the full role description and person specification at: http://mdac.org/en/volunteer_with_mdac

Contact MDAC

Budapest Office:
+361 413 2730

Friends should contact our CEO
on 07769 344 102

Email: support@mdac.org
Twitter: [@MDACintl](https://twitter.com/MDACintl)
Website: www.mdac.org

Find us on [Facebook](#)

PO Box 68543
London SW15 9FP

MDAC is a charity and company limited by guarantee in England and Wales (registration number 1124016).



Pictures from MDAC's January visit to the 'House of Children', an inclusive school in outer Budapest. © MDAC.

We are active on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).
Please follow us, share our content and retweet us!