

What does Citizens Advice Do?

The Citizens Advice Service is independent and provides free, confidential and impartial advice to everybody regardless of race, sex, disability, sexuality or nationality. It is the largest advice-giving network in the UK, with over 3,000 outlets and 20,000 volunteers and help people deal with nearly six million problems every year, in local offices.

Our clients and volunteers come from all walks of life. We are committed to providing an independent advice service, and volunteering opportunities, to the whole community.

Citizens Advice aims to act as a one-stop-shop for clients. Advisers provide up to date advice and information using our unique electronic information system, link clients up with other services and agencies, help write letters and complete forms, negotiate with creditors, make phone calls on clients' behalf and represent them at tribunals.

The problems we are most often asked about concern employment, debt, housing or benefits, but we will help people who come to us with any enquiry including consumer rights, legal matters, and immigration.

Advisers don't tell clients what to do, but explain their options and the possible outcomes of different courses of action. Clients are encouraged to make their own decisions and act on their own behalf. We enable clients to manage their own problems by focusing on their needs as individuals. The Citizens Advice Service is based on four principles.

It is:

- **Independent** – We will always act in the interests of our clients, without influence from any outside bodies
- **Impartial** – We don't judge our clients or make assumptions about them. Our service is open to everyone, and we treat everyone equally
- **Confidential** – We won't pass on anything a client tells us – or even the fact that they've visited us – without their permission
- **Free** – No-one has to pay for any part of the service we provide

Putting these principles into action enables us to provide a vital service to the millions of people who turn to us for help each year.

You can help us make a real difference to people in your community

What does Citizens Advice Do?

Campaign for changes in policies and services

Citizens Advice makes a record of every enquiry brought to them. This adds up to a huge wealth of information about the problems people experience. We work proactively to prevent similar problems happening to others.

National campaigning

We use this evidence to highlight the effects that policies have on real people in the real world, and to suggest where improvements can be made to the policies and services of national and local government and businesses. We aim to stop problems at their source, using the direct experience of the communities that bureaux serve.

Each individual office sends information about the problems brought to them (but not about their clients) to the national Citizens Advice organisation. Evidence is collated to help social policy officers identify national trends. Citizens Advice can then present evidence to policy makers by writing reports and submissions and participating in consultations to improve policies.

Local/regional campaigning

With local or regional issues, bureaux may act individually or join forces with other bureaux and outside agencies, using their client evidence to lobby MPs, Assembly Members (AMs), councillors, local authorities and others, as well as presenting their findings in the media.

Turning evidence into action

The Citizens Advice Service is respected for its impartiality and independent analysis, and is listened to at all levels of government. Councillors, MPs, AMs and Ministers all consult the Citizens Advice Service on a wide range of issues. This enables us to effectively campaign for social justice and get laws and policies changed for the better.

We have recently campaigned on issues as diverse as

- Maternity and parental rights
- Charges for health care
- Support for asylum seekers
- Disability discrimination
- Improving financial literacy



You can help us make life better for everyone

What our volunteers do?

Our volunteer roles

We are indebted to over 20,000 highly trained volunteers who support the delivery of our work.

Our volunteers come from all sorts of backgrounds and help with everything we do.

Volunteering opportunities will vary over time and between local Citizens Advice.

Giving advice

Volunteers who give advice to our clients are at the heart of our service and we could not manage without them.

Volunteer advisers receive full training in the skills needed to help people deal with their problems and learn how to find the information the client needs from our extensive database.

Volunteers are supported and supervised as they begin to give advice and will get feedback and development opportunities throughout their time with Citizens Advice.

There are a variety of roles and tasks up to giving full advice.

"I get a real feeling of satisfaction from making a difference, especially for people less able to stand up for their rights."

Sheila, Citizens Advice,
Stretford



Advisers

Being an adviser is a very varied role.

As an adviser you will:

- Interview clients at drop-in sessions and appointments in the bureau, over the phone and at outreach sessions
- Give information from the CAB electronic information system and other sources
- Give advice in explaining the choices and consequences the client faces
- Give practical help by writing letters, making phone calls, completing forms, doing calculations
- Refer clients to other agencies if they are better placed to help
- Keep records of all clients' cases
- Prevent future problems by identifying issues that affect a lot of clients

You don't need any particular qualifications or experience to train as an adviser. All sorts of people are Citizens Advice advisers.

You need to:

- Be good at listening
- Be able to work in a team
- Be able to read and write English, and do basic maths
- Be open-minded and non-judgemental
- Enjoy helping people Support every step of the way Advisers don't need to know it all!

We provide all trainee advisers with a comprehensive accredited training programme that will give you the skills you need to deliver a high quality service to clients. Our up-to-the-minute electronic information system contains most of the information you will need when advising clients. You won't be left alone after you are trained. There will always be a more experienced adviser, who will give you support, advice and guidance.

All advisers are insured by Citizens Advice in case mistakes are made. Once you have qualified as a Generalist Adviser, you will have the opportunity to develop further skills and increase the depth and breadth of your knowledge.

Please note: If you're a law student and you train as a Citizens Advice adviser, you can get up to six months off your solicitor training contract!

Gateway Assessors

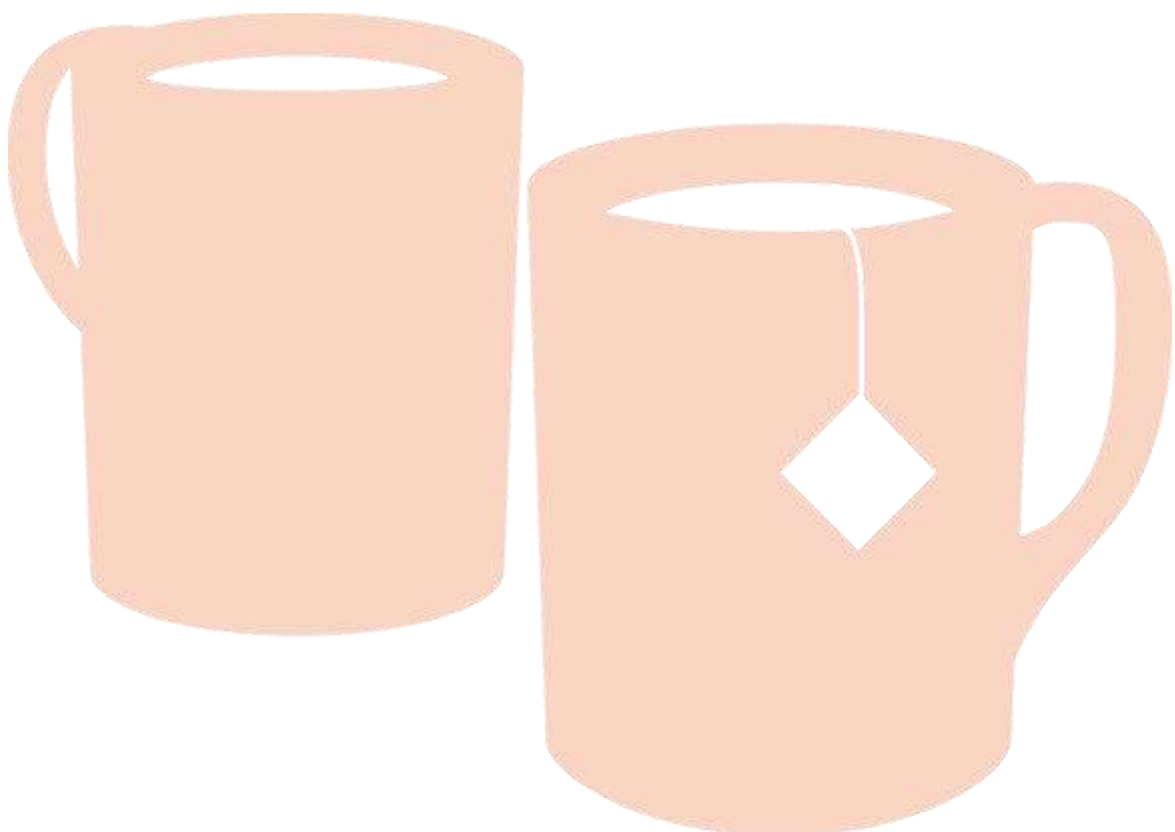
This is a dynamic and focused role.

As a Gateway Assessor you will:

- Greet clients and explain the gateway assessment process
 - Explore the client's problem(s) and situation
 - Assess the risk/urgency of the client's issue and their ability to deal with the problem themselves
 - Identify the next step that needs to be taken
 - Summarise the content of the interview for the client and explain what happens next
 - Ensure clients know they can return if necessary
 - Update the database, completing the gateway assessment screens
- Specific qualifications or experience is not required to train to be a Gateway Assessor. Citizens Advice has a wide range of assessors.

You need to:

- Be good at listening
- Have a good manner when talking to people
- Have basic computing skills
- Be open minded and non-judgemental
- Enjoy helping people



Telephone assessors

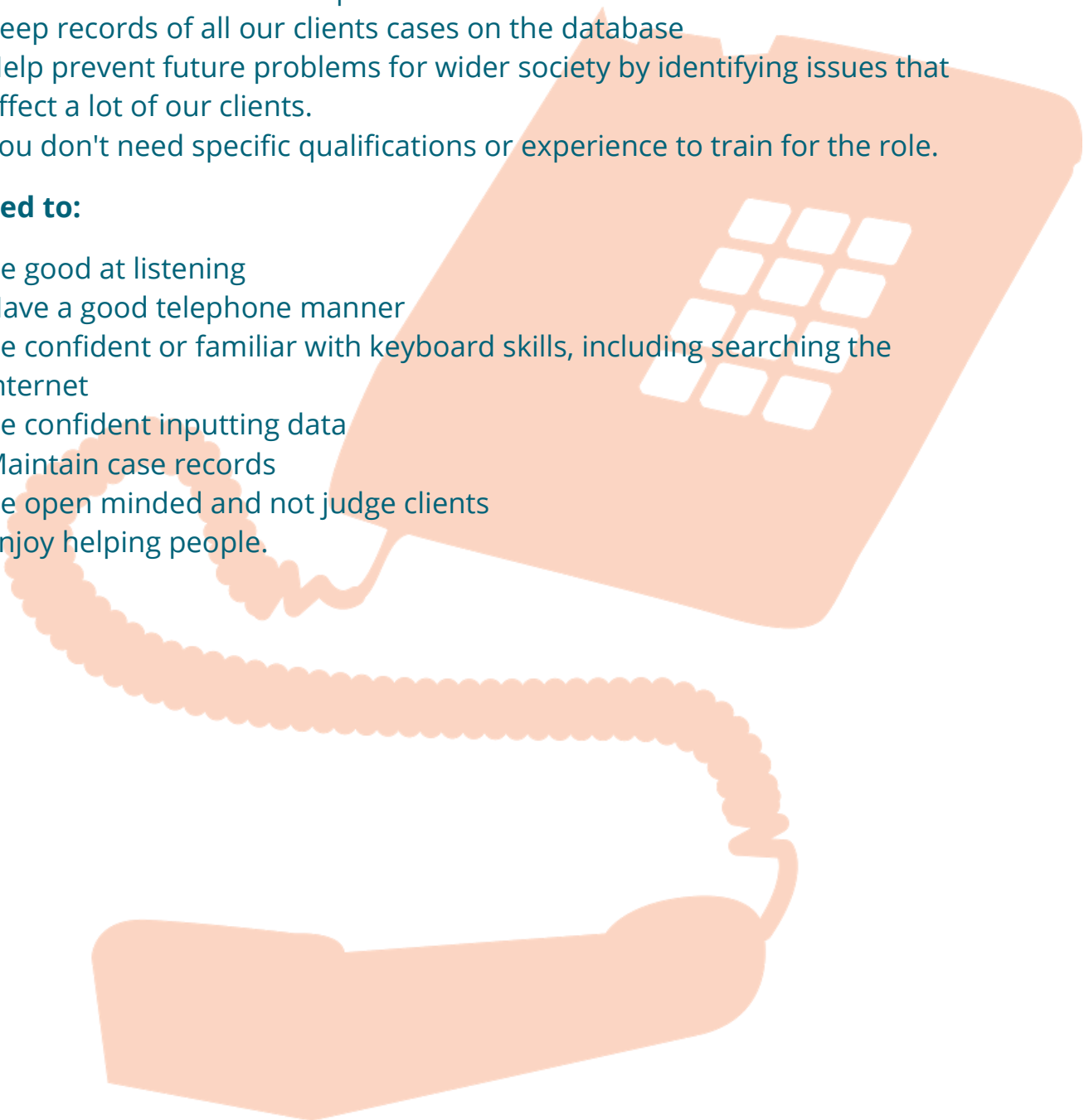
A telephone assessor is a diverse role and you'll not be expected to know it all. We train all our telephone assessors, which help in developing the skills needed to deliver an excellent level of service to our clients.

As a telephone assessor you'd:

- Be the first point of access for Citizens Advice clients and when they call our national telephone service number
- Help with a wide range of problems and issues our clients face
- Support the general public across all ages and backgrounds
- Give information from our Citizens Advice online information system and other sources to our clients
- Refer our clients to more specialist advice where needed
- Keep records of all our clients cases on the database
- Help prevent future problems for wider society by identifying issues that affect a lot of our clients.
- You don't need specific qualifications or experience to train for the role.

You need to:

- Be good at listening
- Have a good telephone manner
- Be confident or familiar with keyboard skills, including searching the internet
- Be confident inputting data
- Maintain case records
- Be open minded and not judge clients
- Enjoy helping people.



Webchat

Volunteering as part of a national team, guiding website users to appropriate information from our public information website, responding online through chat to specific queries.

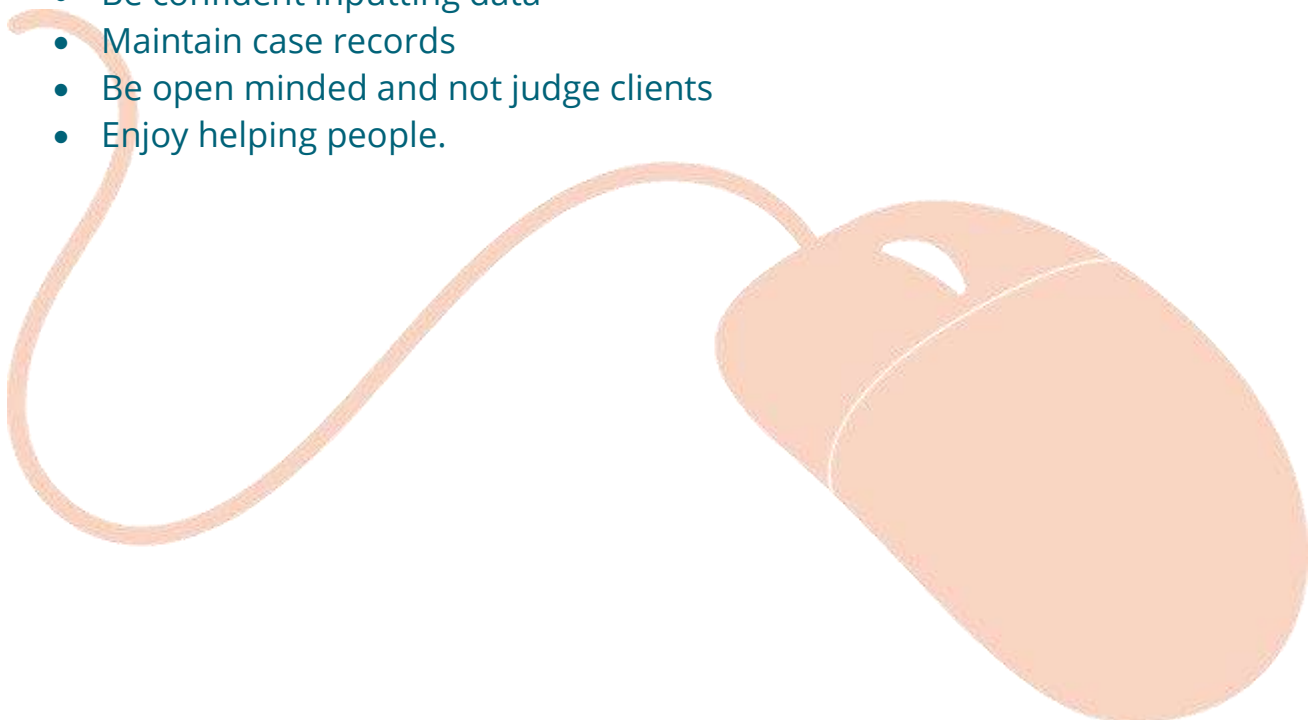
We train our webchat assessors, which help in developing the skills needed to deliver an excellent level of service to our clients.

As a webchat assessor you'd:

- Be the first point of access for Citizens Advice clients when they visit our public information website www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- Help with a wide range of problems and issues our clients face.
- Support the general public across all ages and backgrounds.
- Give information from our Citizens Advice online information system and other sources to our clients.
- Refer our clients to more specialist advice where needed.
- Keep records of all our clients' cases on the database.
- Help prevent future problems for wider society by identifying issues that affect a lot of our clients.
- Attend internal and external training courses (travel expenses will be reimbursed).

You need to:

- Have good written communication skills
- Be confident with keyboard skills, including searching the internet
- Be confident inputting data
- Maintain case records
- Be open minded and not judge clients
- Enjoy helping people.



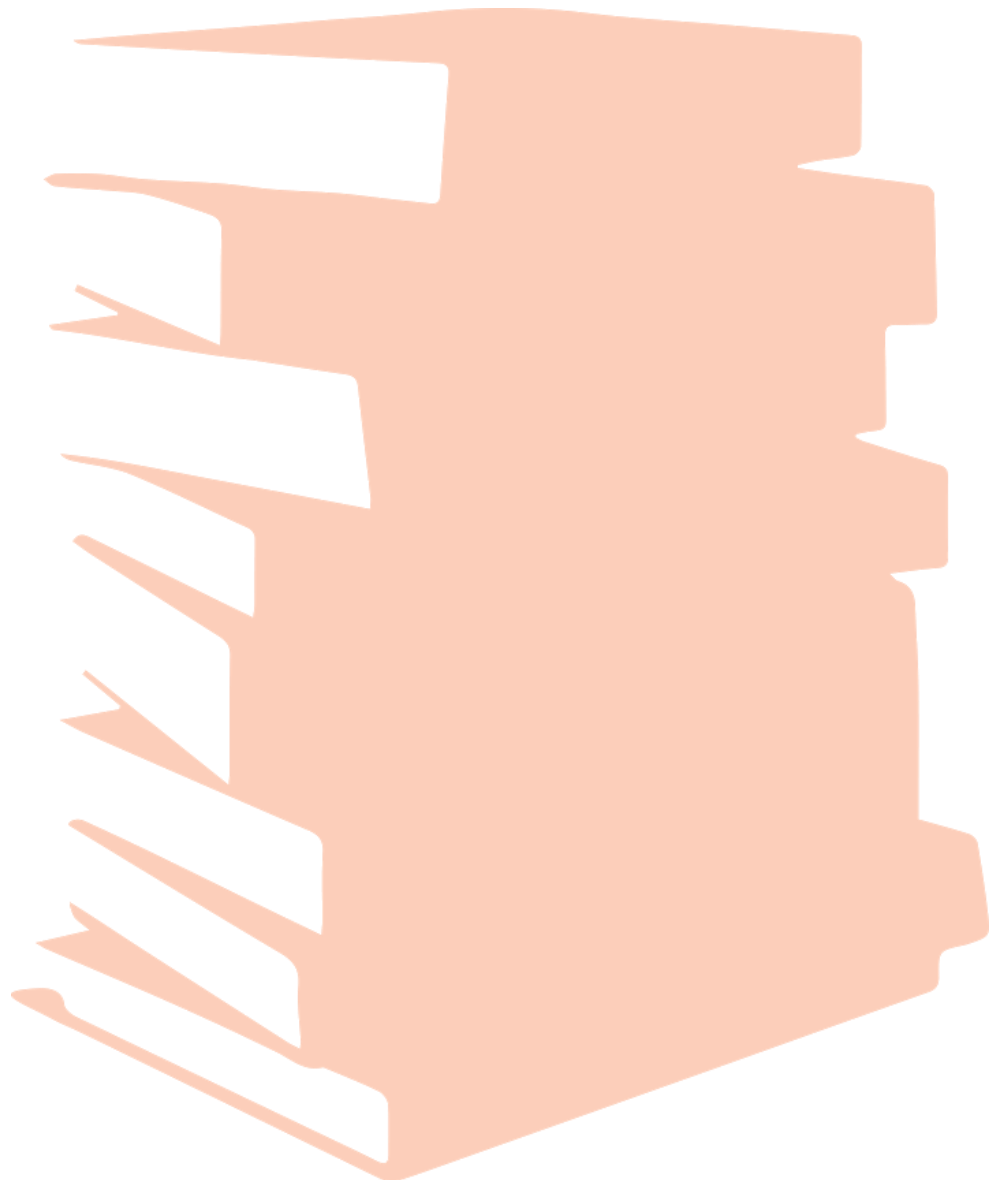
Researcher

Volunteering as part of a Research and Campaign team, helping to identify change through the use of client data, stories and the information we have at our finger tips to identify change that is needed.

We train our Research and Campaign volunteers, which help in developing the skills needed to deliver an excellent level of service to our clients.

As a Researcher you'd:

- Design satisfaction surveys for clients.
- Design surveys for bureau workers.
- Analyse data and writing reports.
- Uphold the aims and principles of the Citizens Advice Service.
- Work within the service's policies and values, especially equal opportunities and anti-discrimination policies.
- Attend internal and external training courses (travel expenses will be reimbursed).



Trustees

Because every local Citizens Advice is a registered charity, each has its own board of trustees. All local Citizens Advice trustee boards welcome people of all ages, backgrounds and experience who are passionate about advice services and can bring innovative ideas, their unique perspective and good judgement.

Most trustee boards meet in the evening, which allows you to fit volunteering around a full time job or study.

As a trustee you would:

- Shape strategy and give direction to the local Citizens Advice
- Act as employer for paid staff
- Manage the local Citizen Advice finances
- Ensure the local Citizens Advice complies with the law
- Be responsible for upkeep of the local Citizens Advice's premises, insurance and equipment.

Some trustee roles, for example Chair, Treasurer or Company Secretary require specific skills and experience. Local Citizens Advice trustee boards are particularly keen to hear from people who have business, legal, funding, income generation, charity governance or advice sector experience.

Campaigners

By using evidence that Citizens Advice gets from our clients, you could help bring about changes in local and national policies and services which can benefit everyone - even those who have never used a local Citizens Advice before.

As a campaigner you'll:

- Fill out and gather evidence forms which explain the detail of what our clients come to us about
- Find out and raise relevant issues in the local Citizens Advice
- Train other staff and volunteers in finding out about issues and completing evidence forms
- Carry out research and write reports
- Get involved in media campaigning
- Work with other local Citizens Advice centres and organisations.

Communications and Marketing

Each local Citizens Advice needs to raise their profile in their local community to get funding, recruit more volunteers, promote local and national Citizens Advice campaigns and help people know how they can use local Citizens Advice services.

As a PR/marketing volunteer you'd help to:

- Produce promotional materials such as leaflets that can be used locally
- Edit press releases shared by the national Citizens Advice press office so that they can be used locally
- Build relationships with your local media contacts and share local stories
- Find out if stories about your local Citizens Advice's work has appeared in local papers and on TV and radio
- Identify case studies of our clients or volunteers who would be willing to talk to the media
- Write content for your local Citizens Advice website or newsletter if it has one
- Be trained to be a local media spokesperson
- Arrange events, displays and talks to promote the local Citizens Advice
- Identify opportunities for your local Citizens Advice to get involved in our annual Advice Week or other national events such as Volunteers week.



Why volunteer for us?

All sorts of people volunteer for many different reasons, but one thing that unites them all is that they find it challenging, rewarding and varied.

Volunteering provides an opportunity to learn new skills and to develop existing ones:

- Citizens Advice Adviser training is respected and valued throughout the advice sector and can be accredited by the Open College Network.
- Each role will enable you to develop specific expertise. For example, you might improve your IT and organisational skills as an administrator, or learn how to deal with the media and develop research skills as a campaigner.
- In any role, you will develop your skills in a number of valuable areas, like communication and dealing with the public, as well as increasing your self-confidence through practical hands-on experience.
- There are opportunities for everyone to develop – you never stop learning!

It's also a chance to put the skills and experience you have to good use helping others. We need people of all ages and backgrounds.

For many people, the best thing about volunteering for the Citizens Advice is getting to meet a wide range of people and make new friends. There is a real team spirit at Citizens Advice Hart District, and we provide a supportive environment to make sure that you get the most out of your time with us.

Some roles are more flexible than others. We'll do our best to find a role for you that fits in with your interests, and we'll be as flexible as possible in enabling you to volunteer at the times that suit you best.

You may find that Citizens Advice Hart District deal with issues close to your heart. For example, more people from black and minority ethnic communities cited the Citizens Advice as their first port of call when seeking advice on discrimination than any other agency (Commission for Racial Equality survey, 1999), and in 2001/02 we ran a major anti-racism campaign.

Above all, it's a chance to make a real difference. By volunteering for Citizens Advice you'll be playing an active part in improving the lives of millions of people and influencing the development of national and local policies and services. And

you won't be out of pocket – Citizens Advice will cover any travel costs incurred by volunteering.

Is it time you gave yourself a new challenge?

https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/support-us/volunteering/volunteering-opportunities_search/

What should I do next?

We hope that what you've read so far has answered some of your questions about volunteering with Citizens Advice – and of course that you're still interested in joining us!

- If you want to know more, please telephone us on 01252 878435 or visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk. We will be happy to answer any questions, and may be able to arrange an informal visit to the bureau for a chat and to tell you more about volunteering opportunities available. The roles available vary from bureau to bureau. We'll be able to tell you when we need volunteers, and hopefully find a role that both meets our needs and fits in with your interests and the times you're available.
- You should then fill in the enclosed application form and return it to Citizens Advice Hart District for the attention of Jo Francis. Citizens Advice Hart District will contact you and invite you for an interview, which will give you both the opportunity to decide whether the role you've chosen is right for you.
- If you are successful after interview you will receive a full induction at the bureau where you will be based.

Thanks for your interest in volunteering with Citizens Advice Hart District, and for taking the time to read this information. We look forward to welcoming you to the Citizens Advice Service.

Citizens Advice is committed to equal opportunities for everyone. We actively welcome volunteers of all ages from a wide range of different backgrounds. We have national staff and volunteer support groups for black and disabled people, women, lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

Volunteering with a disability?

Within Citizens Advice, equal opportunity in volunteering means offering access and equivalent treatment to our volunteers across the whole range of our voluntary recruitment practices. Our aim is to enable all our volunteers to make their distinctive contributions to the benefit of the people who use our service. The Citizens Advice service is determined to develop a working culture that is fair and inclusive.

We regularly review the effect of our volunteer recruitment practices to make sure that they accord with our equality and diversity policy. We encourage our volunteers and staff to welcome diversity, to respect the individuality of each person and value their contributions.

Our commitment to you

The Citizens Advice service is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive culture for our volunteers. We recognise the positive value of diversity, promote equality and fairness, and challenge discrimination. Volunteers contribute significantly to the diversity of our service and can expect to be treated fairly, with dignity and respect and without discrimination. We are committed to developing a working environment that will enable disabled people to gain the appropriate skills and become a valued volunteer within the service.

What you can expect

The Citizens Advice service practices and promotes the equality of opportunity in volunteer recruitment and training. We have committed to and continuously strive to meet the additional needs of disabled staff, arising directly or indirectly because of their volunteer work. Citizen Advice Hart District Council work hard to create an open and welcoming volunteering environment that values and respects your individuality.

Training

Disabled volunteers are given full and fair consideration in all available training and networking relating to their volunteering role. The recruitment and selection process is undertaken by appropriately trained staff and aims to offer information to assess whether the volunteer opportunities available match the potential volunteer's skills, qualities and needs.

National Disabled Workers Group

The National Disabled Workers Group (NDWG) is funded and supported by Citizens Advice to provide guidance, support and to promote equal opportunities for all disabled workers whether they are paid staff or volunteers.

They are a resource for disability related issues, acting as a source of information, training and support to a number of Citizens Advice Bureaux as well as Citizens Advice. NDWG members are provided with training and guidance on policy procedures within Citizens Advice.

The NDWG's membership is open to all disabled people who work within Citizens Advice, member bureaux and affiliated organisations. The NDWG is non-political, independent and provides free, confidential and impartial advice. They have open meetings regularly and can be contacted directly.