



Adviser

# What do Citizens Advice Bureaux do?



Trustee Board Member

## Give advice

The CAB 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. We help people deal with nearly six million problems every year, in bureaux, by phone and email, at outreach sessions in places like GP surgeries and courts – even in people’s homes.



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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.

Bureaux 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.



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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.



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### The CAB 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**



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# What do Citizens Advice Bureaux do?



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## Campaign for changes in policies and services

Citizens Advice Bureaux make 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 bureau 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. The CAB 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 CAB 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 CAB 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
- School uniform costs
- Disability discrimination
- Improving financial literacy

### You can help us make life better for everyone

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# What do our volunteers do?



## 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 phonecalls, completing forms, doing calculations and even representing clients at tribunals
- 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 CAB 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 CAB 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.

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# What do our volunteers do?



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## Administrators

Administrators ensure that bureau systems run smoothly. Good support is essential for the running of any organisation, and CAB is no different. There are many different administrative roles – we can match your skills and time available to the bureau's needs. Tasks may include:

- Using spread sheets, databases and word processing packages
- Maintaining and developing administrative systems
- Stock control of leaflets and materials and updating information
- Helping to arrange events
- Receiving and sending faxes, mail, email and telephone calls
- Taking notes and minutes at meetings

## Receptionists

Receptionists are the public face of the CAB. They are the main link between the public and the bureau. This role would suit people who are methodical, organised and patient. As a receptionist, you would:

- Greet clients and make them feel comfortable
- Arrange appointments and answer phonecalls
- Provide information on the CAB Service to clients
- Manage the waiting room
- Keep records

## IT support co-ordinators

The CAB Service is increasingly taking advantage of developments in IT. As an IT support volunteer you may be involved in a variety of areas, depending on your skills and the time you have available, for example:

- Supporting and training users in day-to-day use of IT systems
- Troubleshooting hardware and software problems
- Maintaining and developing networks
- Designing spreadsheets, databases and websites

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# What do our volunteers do?



## Trustee Board Members

All Citizens Advice Bureaux are independent charities, governed by their own board of trustees, who are ultimately responsible for the quality and range of the service. Day-to-day control is delegated to the bureau manager, but Trustees:

- Set the overall direction and support the development of the bureau
- Ensure the bureau meets the needs of the local community and the Citizens Advice membership standards
- Employ CAB staff and control bureau finances
- Earn and retain the respect of important and influential people and organisations in the community, including funding bodies
- Ensure the bureau complies with relevant laws

Bureau trustee boards need people from all sections of the community with a wide range of different skills, experience and perspectives. Trustee boards tend to meet in the evenings, making this a flexible role, which trustees often fit around a full-time job. A full induction into the trustee board's role and responsibilities will be provided.

## Campaigners

Campaigners, or Social Policy Co-ordinators, use information from problems brought to the bureau by clients to help bring about real change by influencing local and national policy. This is a flexible role, which can sometimes be partly carried out away from the bureau and outside their opening hours. It can involve:

- Completing and collating evidence forms that record information about the problems clients experience
- Identifying and raising issues in the bureau and at meetings
- Training staff and volunteers in spotting particular issues and completing evidence forms
- Conducting research and writing reports on local issues
- Media campaigning and liaising with other bureaux and agencies to provide a voice for clients

Some bureaux also involve volunteers in other roles, such as press and PR, fundraising, volunteer recruitment and community liaison.

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# What do our volunteers do?



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## Gateway assessment roles

Citizens Advice's new gateway approach helps clients to be quickly assessed and their issues progressed to the most appropriate next stage. That might be self-help information or an appointment with a specialist adviser. Gateway interviews can be carried out face-to-face or by telephone. The following new roles help to support this approach.



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## Reception:

The gateway approach extends the reception role and depending on the resources in the bureau the role may be undertaken by one or more people. The role is an integral part of the session team, with the advice session supervisor actively supporting and keeping you informed about the session.

### As a reception worker you will:

- Greet clients and other visitors
- Ensure clients know what is happening and how long they have to wait
- Explain the services available
- Point out and hand out leaflets, lists and self-help materials
- Monitor client numbers and waiting times
- Maintain the reception area
- Enter information into computer systems



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### Specific qualifications and experience are not required to take on the reception role. You need to:

- Have a good manner when talking to people
- Have basic computing skills
- An understanding of, and commitment to, confidentiality
- Be friendly and approachable



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## Information Assistants

Information Assistants play a key role in enabling clients to find the information that they need and/or to use the different facilities, kiosks, online PCs, benefits calculators, direct-dial phones and so on, that are available.

### As an Information Assistant you will:

- Actively promote the use of kiosks/PCs
- Support clients using kiosks or PCs



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- Help identify the correct leaflet, self-help resource or service provider
- Identify where a gateway assessment may be required
- Record client numbers and issues

**Specific qualifications and experience are not required to take on the role. You need to:**

- Have a good manner when talking to people
- Have basic computing and good literacy skills
- Be friendly and approachable

## 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 are 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

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# What do our volunteers say?



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**"Every session is different. You can actually make a difference for people, and you are valued for who you are."**

Angela, High Wycombe CAB

**"I have increased confidence, much more knowledge, lots of new friends and respect from my children."**

Margaret, Havering CAB



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**"It's a vital service run for and by people of all ages."**

Stephen, Rugeley CAB

**"The training was extremely thorough. The support is fantastic from everyone in the bureau. I find being an adviser rewarding, stimulating, at times humbling, and very enjoyable."**

Barbara, Rhyl CAB



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**"The other volunteers are very friendly, and we work as a team helping each other."**

Anita, Farnborough CAB

**"I've become more aware of what my rights are and got to meet some great people. It helps you to better yourself and it helps on your CV to get a job and further your career."**

Shabana, Manchester CAB Telephone Advice Line



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**"It's great being able to help people in so many different ways, being able to learn from and appreciate what others are experiencing, and there's a real co-operative spirit in the bureau."**

Michael, Tonbridge CAB

**"My confidence has definitely increased, and I've gained about a thousand new skills with as many again still to learn."**

Denise, Bedworth & District CAB



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

Sheila, Stretford CAB

**"I wish I'd started 30 years ago! I've learned new skills, including computing. Volunteering with CAB keeps you involved with the real world."**

Sheila, Witney & District CAB



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**"I get a sense of being involved – I like being part of the bureau activities and keeping up with issues. I feel proud of the CAB and being part of it – and we have a laugh too."**

Karin, Oxford CAB

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# Why volunteer for us?



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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:

- CAB 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!



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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 CAB is getting to meet a wide range of people and make new friends. There is a real team spirit at CAB, and we provide a supportive environment to make sure that you get the most out of your time with us.



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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 the CAB deals with issues close to your heart. For example, more people from black and minority ethnic communities cited the CAB 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.



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Above all, it's a chance to make a real difference. By volunteering for CAB 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 – CAB will cover any travel costs incurred by volunteering. Some bureaux are also able to pay for other expenses, for example, child care costs.



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## Is it time you gave yourself a new challenge?

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# What should I do next?



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

- If you want to know more, please call your local bureau – see your local phone book or [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk). They 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 there. The roles available vary from bureau to bureau. They'll be able to tell you when they need volunteers, and hopefully find a role that both meets their needs and fits in with your interests and the times you're available.
- You should then fill in the enclosed application form and send it to the bureau. The bureau 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 CAB, and for taking the time to read this information. We look forward to welcoming you to the CAB Service.

**CAB 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.**

Citizens Advice Bureaux need volunteers from all communities.

সিটিজেন্স অ্যাডভাইস ব্যুরোর সমস্ত কমিউনিটি থেকে ভলান্টিয়ার বা স্বেচ্ছাসেবক দরকার।

Les centres d'information sur les droits des citoyens ont besoin de bénévoles venant de toutes les communautés.

ਸਿਟੀਜ਼ਨਜ਼ ਐਡਵਾਈਸ ਬਿਊਰੋ ਨੂੰ ਸਭ ਕਮਿਊਨਿਟੀਆਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਵੋਲੰਟੀਅਰਜ਼ ਦੀ ਜ਼ਰੂਰਤ ਹੈ।

Mae angen gwirfoddolwyr o bob cymuned ar Cyngor ar Bopeth.

مكتب إرشاد المواطنين (سيتيزينز أدفايس بيرو) بحاجة إلى متطوعين من جميع الجاليات.

市民諮詢局需要來自所有社區的志願工作人員。

सिटीजेंस एडवाइस ब्यूरो को हर समुदाय से स्वयंसेवकों की आवश्यकता है।

El Citizen's Advice Bureau (Servicio de Asesoramiento al Ciudadano) necesita voluntarios de todos los colectivos.

سٹیزن ایڈوائیز بیورو کو تمام کمیونٹیوں سے رضا کاروں کی ضرورت ہے۔

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/volunteer\\_bureau\\_search](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/volunteer_bureau_search)





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# Volunteering with a disability



Within the Citizens Advice Bureau network, 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. Citizens Advice Bureaux work hard to create an open and welcoming volunteering environment that values and respects your individuality.

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# Volunteering with a disability



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## 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.

See [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/volunteerdisabilities](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/volunteerdisabilities)