

Volunteering at Citizens Advice Barnsley What do I need to know?



Our organisation

Citizens Advice Barnsley has been around since 1964. Since we first opened our doors to the public, volunteers have played a vital role in the service. Today, volunteers are involved in many areas of our work, from reception and administration to research and campaigns and information and advice.

We provide free, confidential, impartial and independent information and advice. Our clients access the service by phone, email, webchat, online, as well as during our debt drop-in sessions and by face to face appointment. Our main centre of operations is in Wellington Street in the town centre, but our outreach team is out in local communities every day of the week. Our clients' problems are varied and sometimes complex. They can include benefits, debt, employment, housing, family, immigration, consumer or any other area of law.

As a charity, we have to continually seek out funding opportunities. We must generate our own income if the service is to continue. Many people don't realise that we are a charity and we still have work to do in relation to raising awareness of this.

Our team

As you'd expect, our team is made up of a mixture of paid staff and volunteers. We usually have between 30 and 40 volunteers at any given time, working alongside paid staff. Volunteers are supported throughout their learning by our training officer and are supported by a team of service supervisors whenever they are working with clients. CAB is a friendly, inclusive place to volunteer. You'll meet people from varied backgrounds with varied interests, all of whom come to CAB because they enjoy helping people, want to influence change in local and national policy and enjoy learning. As a new volunteer you will be supported by everyone, including more experienced volunteers who know exactly how you feel because they were once new to CAB too.

Training

The training is easily accessible, but requires a commitment to learning. Our blended learning programmes are made up of a mixture of self-study packs, e-learning, practical coaching sessions and participative observation. The length of each unit varies with the complexity of the tasks that volunteers are engaged in. So, someone volunteering in an administrative capacity will have less study to complete than someone learning to give advice. We check that volunteers in every role are able to meet a minimum time commitment every week. For information and advice roles this is 8 hours per week. These volunteering hours allow volunteers to complete training, attend volunteer meetings, observe a wide range of activities and work towards their chosen goals in a

timely manner. We've found that sporadic volunteering doesn't work! Ultimately, our volunteers are providing a professional service to the public and so we need to be able to rely on them.

Recruitment

Our recruitment process has 2 stages:

- Completion of an application form
- An informal interview

The process allows plenty of opportunity to ask any questions you might have, to find out more about the roles our volunteers are involved in and to get to know more about the work we do. We think Citizens Advice Barnsley is an amazing place to volunteer. But we are biased and we'd like you to make up your own mind before you commit!

Volunteering roles

You might already know the kind of things you'd like to be involved in, but in case you don't, we'll give you a quick run through of our current volunteering roles.

Administration – You would be involved in maintaining and developing administrative systems, stock control of leaflets and materials and updating information, helping to arrange events, creating promotional materials e.g. leaflets and posters, receiving and sending faxes, mail, email and telephone calls, taking notes and minutes at meetings, scanning and filing documents, supporting/assisting the Office Manager with administration.

Reception – You would be involved with welcoming clients coming into the reception area, explaining how the service operates to clients, providing information about the CAB and other advice services to clients from a diverse range of backgrounds and cultures, working collaboratively with other colleagues involved in the advice work process and liaising with advice staff regarding support for individual clients. You will provide a service that is based on sensitivity and respect for clients, acknowledge children and / or any special needs and take appropriate action, maintain confidentiality about clients and their contact with the bureau, consult the advice service supervisor appropriately, work within agreed bureau systems and procedures, answer the telephone and refer calls or take messages, process client information collected at the reception helpdesk. It's likely that you'll provide clients with information where appropriate, including details of other agencies, and point out leaflets / factsheets from public information websites, you'll regularly check that client information leaflets and posters are up to date.

Telephone gateway assessor – this is the launch pad for a number of volunteering roles in the bureau. Once you reach competence in this role, you can move onto...just about anything!

You'll assess clients' problem(s) using sensitive listening and questioning skills, identify key information about the problem including time limits, key dates and any requirement for urgent advice or action (using the public information site and any other diagnostic tools, as necessary), identify and summarise the essence of the problem, establish what the client wants, assess and agree the appropriate level of service, taking into consideration the client's ability to take the next step themselves, the complexity of the problem and the bureau's resources, refer clients appropriately (both internally and externally) to suit clients' needs following agreed protocols, including making arrangements and informing clients of what to expect, signpost clients appropriately to suit their needs following agreed protocols, consult with service supervisors, record information given during gateway assessment interviews onto Petra, our case recording system, contribute to our research and campaigns work and attend volunteer's meetings and other training events.

Once you've completed your gateway assessor training, you could move onto the following roles:

Adviser – You'll be involved in assessing clients' problem(s) using sensitive listening and questioning skills, interviewing clients, both face-to-face and on the telephone, letting the client explain their enquiry and helping the client to set priorities. You'll identify key information about the problem including time limits, key dates and any requirement for urgent advice or action, assess and agree the appropriate level of service, taking into consideration the client's ability to take the next step themselves, the complexity of the problem and the bureau's resources. You'll find, interpret and communicate the relevant information and explore options and implications in order that the client can come to a decision. You'll then act, where necessary, on behalf of the client, negotiating, drafting or writing letters or making appropriate referrals and recording clear and accurate case records. You'll contribute to Research and Campaigns work by completing evidence forms, keeping up to date on important issues by attending the appropriate training and by essential reading, attending workers meetings and other training events. You'll help us maintain the bureau's quality of advice.

Research and campaigns support – in this role you'll help advisers to identify suitable cases for social policy work, assist with completion of social policy evidence forms, check completed Bureau Evidence Forms, complete Bureau Evidence Forms from advisers' Quick Evidence Forms, organize collection of evidence for local and national projects and reports, uphold the aims and principles of the CAB service, work within the service's policies and values, especially equal opportunity and anti-discrimination policies.

And finally..... 10 reasons why you should volunteer

1. You will meet a whole range of people who come together in order to help other people with the problems they face.
2. You will acquire new skills and knowledge in a supportive environment and those skills will make you feel great.
3. You'll get to know your community better and feel part of it in a way you might never have felt before.
4. You'll be using your skills and knowledge in a really productive way and that feels good.
5. You'll challenge yourself to do more than you thought you could and when you meet the goals you set for yourself you'll feel awesome.
6. Your confidence levels will increase because you will see the positive impact you're having.
7. You'll see first hand the impact of local and national government policy and legislation and where it's affecting people unfairly, you'll be able to contribute to changing those policies instead of just shouting at the TV!
8. You'll be out of the house, keeping your brain active, feeling part of something important.
9. Because you like it so much, you'll inspire others to help people and that will contribute to making society a better place for all of us.
10. Your experience will change the way you see the world.

Find out more

There are plenty of ways that you can find out more about CAB.

Our national website www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Our local website www.barnsleycab.org.uk

Our Facebook page www.facebook.com/barnsleycab

Our Twitter feed www.twitter.com/@BarnsleyCAB

Or you could ask our training officer elisabeth.evans@barnsleycab.org.uk

To make a donation or raise funds while you shop visit our easyfundraising page [here](#)

We hope that we sound like your kind of organisation and that you'll submit an application.

Thanks for your interest!