

# Volunteering at Citizens Advice Watford



May 2021



# An introduction to the Citizens Advice Service

## We help people find a way forward

We can all face problems that seem complicated or intimidating. At Citizens Advice we believe no one should have to face these problems without good quality, independent advice.

That's why we're here: to give people the knowledge and the confidence they need to find their way forward - whoever they are, and whatever their problem.

## We give advice to millions of people

Our network of independent charities offers confidential advice online, over the phone, and in person, for free.

When we say we're for everyone, we mean it. People rely on us because we're independent and totally impartial.

We also give advice on consumer rights on our consumer helpline, support witnesses in courts through the Witness Service and give pension guidance to people aged over 50.

We help millions of people every year. In 2019-20, this included:

- **34,500,000** visits to our website
- **1,344,000** people helped face to face
- **1,010,000** people using our phone service
- **483,000** people contacting our consumer helpline
- **436,000** people getting help by email or webchat
- **97,000** witnesses through the Witness Service

In total we helped **2.8 million** people in person, by phone, email or web chat. Our advice website had over **34.5 million** visits and the site had **54.5 million** pageviews.

We provide support in **2,540 locations** across England and Wales with **21,400 volunteers** and **8,150 staff**.

## **We speak up for our clients**

No one else sees so many people with so many different kinds of problems, and that gives us a unique insight into the challenges people are facing today.

With the right evidence, we can show big organisations – from companies right up to the government – how they can make things better for people.

We see how problems can be linked. By helping people with the underlying cause of their problems and making sure they don't get worse, we save the government and public services hundreds of millions of pounds every year.

We also look out for people as the statutory consumer watchdog for the energy and post industries. We show where things are going wrong and how to help make it better for people.

## **We make a difference**

Last year we helped to solve the problems of **8 in 10** of the people who we gave advice to directly.

**9 in 10** said that our advice had helped them find a way forward and **9 in 10** would recommend us to a friend.

Our service saves society money. In 2018-19 the advice we delivered directly saved government and public services at least **£435 million** - that's £2 for every £1 spent on the service.

**You can read more about the impact of the Citizens Advice service in our 2018-19 Impact Report [ [440 kb](#)].**



# Citizens Advice Watford

At Citizens Advice Watford, volunteers are at the heart of the service we provide to people in the local community. We operate a walk-in service for initial assessments from 9.30am to 3.30pm, Monday to Thursday. The same service can be accessed by telephone from 10am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Most of our volunteers provide general information and advice, but we offer specialist services in debt and money, welfare benefits, housing, consumer and employment. We are fortunate to have engaged the services of a local family solicitor offering free legal advice.

## Volunteering at Citizens Advice Watford

### What do volunteers do?

At Citizens Advice Watford we have around 60 volunteers in various roles including administrator, adviser, gateway assessor, receptionist, research & campaigns co-ordinator, supervisor and trustee. The training and commitment required varies according to the role and is an important factor to consider in deciding which role to apply for.

We rely on our volunteers to provide a consistent service to our clients, so most volunteers come in on the same day each week at the same time. For people who can't make a regular commitment but still want to help, a role in fundraising or research & campaigns or as a trustee might be suitable.

See below for more information about each of our volunteering roles.

### Volunteer administrator

Administrators support the work of the service by answering the telephone, calling clients to confirm appointments, filing, dealing with correspondence and updating digital records.

This role requires a regular minimum time commitment of one morning or one afternoon per week. Some of the skills you will need include:

- Ability to use IT systems including Microsoft Office and databases
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Telephone communication skills
- Organisational and time management skills.

## Volunteer adviser

Advisers have face to face and telephone appointments with clients to explore their enquiries in detail. An adviser helps people to identify their rights and responsibilities, the options available to them, and the most appropriate actions to take. An adviser will typically work with two clients in a morning or afternoon session, with each interview lasting one and a half to two hours including research, case recording and follow-up work. Advisers undertake intensive training and have access to the Citizens Advice information system to support them in their work, as well as specialist support from our expert advice teams, and in-house support and supervision.

This role requires a regular minimum time commitment of seven hours per week for at least two years. This can be spread across two half days or can take up one full day. Some of the skills you will need include:

- Attention to detail
- Excellent communication skills (verbal and written)
- Research and analytical skills
- Ability to work as part of a team, including receiving feedback.



## **Volunteer gateway assessor**

Gateway assessors see clients face to face and speak to them over the telephone for an initial assessment of their enquiry. They identify the issue and the most appropriate next steps the client can take towards resolving it. An assessor will typically see up to six clients in a morning or afternoon session, using information on the Citizens Advice public website [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) as well as other resources, to assist them. At the end of the interview, the client will have been given information to help them progress their enquiry, signposted to another organisation for further help, or given an appointment for general or specialist advice.

This role requires a regular minimum time commitment of seven hours per week for at least one year. This can be spread across two half days or can take up one full day. Some of the skills you will need include:

- Ability to work quickly and efficiently under pressure
- Listening skills
- Ability to explain complex information in simple terms
- Ability to work as part of a team, including receiving feedback.

## **Volunteer receptionist**

Receptionists are the public face of Citizens Advice Watford and play a key role in determining our clients' experience of their contact with us. Receptionists welcome visitors and explain how the service operates, liaise with other roles within the service, manage the reception area, support vulnerable clients, input confidential client data and respond to general enquiries from clients and visitors.

This role requires a regular minimum time commitment of four hours per week. Some skills you will need include:

- Communication skills
- Ability to remain calm under pressure
- Customer service skills
- IT skills
- Ability to work as part of a team, including receiving feedback.



## Other volunteering roles

If you have a particular interest or skill which you would like to offer, we will try to match you with a suitable opportunity. For example, someone with marketing or fundraising experience could help us with publicity or fundraising events, someone with experience in communications could help us develop and maintain our social media presence, and someone with an interest in research and policy could get involved with some of our research and campaigning work. Our board of trustees is also made up of volunteers from the local community. The board meets four times a year in the evening, as well as attending other events and working groups, to support the governance of the organisation.



'Extremely helpful, professional and kind reception staff should be recognised for their hard work.'

# Volunteering FAQs

## **What training and support do you provide?**

The impact of advice on our clients is significant and quality is paramount. Advisers and assessors are highly trained and supported by experienced supervisors. The Citizens Advice Adviser Learning Programme is highly regarded because it is rigorous and demanding. A competency-based modular programme, it comprises individual study, observation activities, group sessions and external training courses. A variety of methods is used to assess competence at various points during the programme, and a certificate is issued on completion.

At Watford we deliver the programme over a 12-week period of weekly group sessions supported by independent study. This is followed by a further period of learning while working with clients. The time it takes to reach competence depends on how much time each volunteer is able to commit. As a guide, a gateway assessor volunteering for one day every week could be fully trained in nine months to a year, and adviser training will typically take a further year of learning and working with clients before full competence is reached. Trainee assessors and advisers work with clients during their training in the same way as those who are qualified, but with more support and supervision.

## **What skills and experience do I need?**

Our volunteers come from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures and bring a wealth of different skills, knowledge and experience to their work. We celebrate the diversity of our volunteers, which reflects the community we serve. We do not prescribe any previous knowledge or experience, because we provide comprehensive training and support; however, much of the work we do is computer-based, so a reasonable level of proficiency in using information technology is required.

Likewise, the people who use our service have an equally diverse range of experience and attributes, which may include mental and / or physical health conditions and the effects of poverty or social exclusion. Some are vulnerable or speak a language other than English as their first language. It's important for volunteers to understand how these challenges can impact people's lives and to respond with empathy and without judgement or pre-conception.

## **How much time do I need to commit?**

Volunteering as an adviser or gateway assessor is a serious commitment, and we ask all prospective volunteers to carefully consider whether their individual circumstances are compatible with a regular, long term volunteering role before applying. We invest considerable resources in training and developing volunteers in these roles, in the expectation of a long-term contribution to the service we provide to our clients.

For the gateway role, we ask our volunteers to be available on a regular weekly basis for at least one day per week (or two half-day sessions) for a minimum period of one year. For the adviser role the commitment is the same but for a minimum of two years. During the initial stage of the learning programme you may find that the volume of learning requires a little more of your time than this, but the learning materials are online and some can be completed at home.

If you would like to volunteer but you can't make a long-term commitment, you can still make a valued contribution to our service. Please contact us for more information about the other volunteering opportunities available at Citizens Advice Watford.

## **What are the benefits of volunteering at Citizens Advice Watford?**

Volunteers offer their services for nothing but are rewarded by the satisfaction of helping others in their community. We reimburse all reasonable expenses incurred in travelling to and from the office or other venue. Volunteering can provide you with training and experience in key skills which are valued by prospective employers or offer routine and structure to those no longer in paid employment. Volunteers forge bonds and friendships with each other through social interaction with like-minded people working towards a common goal. We hold regular monthly workers' meetings, an annual summer party and a Christmas lunch to celebrate the dedication and commitment of all our volunteers.



'My involvement has been enormously eye-opening and enriching.'

## Student volunteers

We welcome students who are able to make a regular commitment. Many of our student volunteers are law students wishing to gain experience of working with clients in a legal advice setting. We can offer student volunteers opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in preparation for a legal career. It is particularly beneficial to join us after summer exams in the first year and undertake the initial training during the summer vacation.



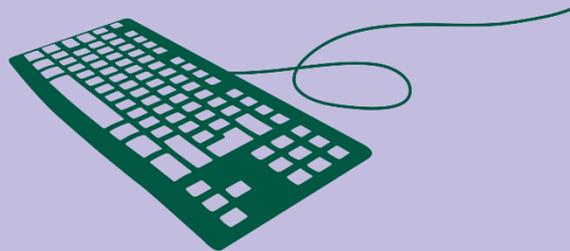
Students can volunteer in any role, and we currently have students volunteering as consumer advisers, gateway assessors and receptionists. Some of our former student volunteers have gone on to secure training contracts, while others have found the skills and experience gained have prepared the ground for careers in other sectors such as the Civil Service and teaching.

# Apply to become a volunteer at Citizens Advice Watford

We usually recruit volunteer gateway assessors and advisers in groups starting in January, May and September, with weekly group learning sessions for the first 12 weeks. We hold regular information mornings at which you can come and meet some of the staff and volunteers and find out more about volunteering here. Please see our website or contact us for details of the next information morning.

At the information morning you will be invited to request an application form if you would like to apply. Once we have received your completed form, we will invite you to attend an interview at which you can ask any further questions you might have, and we can find out more about you.

If you are interested in a reception or administration role, we can accept applications for these roles at any time (subject to availability) so please email the address below to request an application form.



## Contact us

To find out more please visit our website [www.cawatford.org.uk](http://www.cawatford.org.uk) or email [recruitment@watfordcab.cabinet.org.uk](mailto:recruitment@watfordcab.cabinet.org.uk)

