

What does Stratford upon Avon Citizens Advice Bureau do?

Give advice

Stratford upon Avon CAB is independent and provides free, confidential and impartial advice to everybody regardless of race, sex, disability, sexuality or nationality. We are part of the largest advice-giving network in the UK; we have one main bureau, four outreaches and approx 50 volunteers. We help people deal with nearly 8000 problems every year, in the bureau, by phone and email, at outreach sessions – even in people’s homes. 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 AdviserNet, 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 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

What does Stratford upon Avon Citizens Advice Bureau do?

Campaign for changes in policies and services

We make a record of every enquiry brought to us. 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 we serve. We send information about the problems brought to us (but not about our clients) to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. 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, we can act individually or join forces with outside agencies, using our client evidence to lobby MPs, Assembly Members (AMs), councillors, local authorities and others, as well as presenting our 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
Support for asylum seekers
Disability discrimination

Charges for health care
School uniform costs
Improving financial literacy

You can help us make life better for everyone

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:

Each role will enable you to develop specific expertise. For example, you might improve your IT and organisational skills as an administrator. 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 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.

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.

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.

Is it time you gave yourself a new challenge?

What do our volunteers do?

Advisers

- Interview clients at drop-in sessions and appointments in the bureau, over the phone and at outreach sessions
- Give information from the CAB electronic 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 calculation 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

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 and guidance. All advisers are insured by CAB in case mistakes are made. Plus you will be encouraged to continue developing and growing as an adviser with many learning opportunities available.

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

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-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 organizations 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.

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 phone calls
- Provide information on the CAB Service to clients
- Manage the waiting room
- Keep records

Kiosk Receptionist/Information Assistant

The CAB Service is increasingly taking advantage of developments in IT. As a kiosk receptionist volunteer you would be involved in:

- Inviting and encouraging clients to use the kiosks
- Showing clients how to use the kiosk and access various websites.
- Providing support to clients using the kiosk
- Keep a log of how many people have used the kiosk

What should I do next?

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 01789 200133 and ask for Ann she will be happy to answer any questions, and to tell you more about volunteering opportunities available.

The roles available vary from bureau to bureau. Ann will be able to tell you where and 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 application form and send it to the address given on the back of the form. Once this is received Ann will contact you to invite you to come to an informal interview. This will give you both the opportunity to decide whether the role you've chosen is right for you. If you are successful after interview, Ann will apply for two references and, if these are satisfactory, you will receive a full induction into Citizens Advice.

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.

Stratford upon Avon CAB needs volunteers from all communities.

CAB volunteer recruitment line 01789 200133