



Citizens Advice Peterborough (CAP)



New Volunteer Information Guide

Contact us

Email: volunteering@peterboroughcab.org.uk

Website: www.citapeterborough.org.uk

Address: 16-17 St Mark's Street, Peterborough, PE1 2TU

Volunteering for Citizens Advice Peterborough (CAP)

CAP seeks to recruit a variety of volunteers from all backgrounds as we value all experiences and skills, including community languages.

No formal qualifications are required to join us as full training and ongoing support is provided for all new volunteers. What is important is an open mind, a willingness to develop skills and sufficient time available to put these to use within the service.

One of the benefits of the volunteering experience at CAP is the opportunity to work amongst a wide diversity of different colleagues with a common interest in the aims and principles of the Citizens Advice Service.

Why volunteer with us?

All sorts of people volunteer with us and for many different reasons, but one thing that unites them all is that they find it challenging, rewarding and varied. Volunteering with Citizens Advice Peterborough gives you a chance to make an active difference to people's lives in your community.

When asked about why they volunteered for their local advice centre, volunteers responded:

- To help people of any community
- I find the work interesting and stimulating
- I have grown to know and like the people I work with
- To help people of my own community
- To give me an interest outside the home
- To gain experience that might be useful for future employment
- To meet new people
- To use my skills and experience
- To increase knowledge and learn new skills
- To give something back and to make a contribution



Former clients

We welcome applications from former clients but our policy is that you should not be a volunteers with us at the same time as using our advice service. You need to wait until your case is completely finished and then get back in touch.

Should you need further advice during your volunteering you may need to use another advice agency, separate and independent from CAP, or suspend your work with us while your enquiry is dealt with.

What is Citizens Advice Peterborough (CAP)?

CAP is a member of the national Citizens Advice network, a company limited by guarantee and a local registered charity.

We provide an advice service for all in the city but a disproportionate number of our clients are vulnerable individuals, including people facing language barriers, mental and physical disabilities, health problems or simply those who do not have enough resources to live on.

We operate a wide range of services from our office in the city centre, offering free and impartial advice on topics such as housing, benefits, immigration and debt. You will find more information about these various services on the CAP website.



The work we do

Citizens Advice Peterborough opened in 1967, and moved to its current premises in 1998. The service provides advice on a wide range of issues via drop-in assessments; pre-arranged appointments; telephone and email advice, outreach and home visits. During 2015/16, we helped nearly 10,000 people with more than 19,300 issues, including:

- **Welfare benefits and tax credits** e.g. helping to challenge decisions that stop benefits payments or information about being eligible for benefits
- **Housing** e.g. problems with landlords, bonds or poor conditions
- **Immigration** e.g. information and help on a person's right to stay in or enter the country
- **Debt** e.g. multi debt problems, bailiffs, home repossession
- **Employment** e.g. unfair dismissal, minimum wage, bullying

Our funding

CAP's funding comes from a variety of sources including Peterborough City Council, Nationwide, Lloyd's Foundation and the Money and Pensions Service as well as other grants and donations. The service is run by an independent board of trustees who are also volunteers.



How volunteers help us

CAP offers a number of volunteer roles that provide an advice or information service to members of the public. You will find more detailed role descriptions on our website.

Volunteer Information Assessor

Minimum time: two half day sessions per week

Minimum expected duration: 9 months

This role involves communicating with clients face to face and over the phone, supporting them to access self-help resources and managing the flow of clients through the service. The role is essential as it is often the first experience the public will have with the service and it would be suitable especially for those with additional language or communication skills such as BSL.

Volunteer Generalist Adviser

Minimum time: Two half day sessions per week (more during training period)

Minimum expected duration: 12 months

When a client needs to understand the law behind their enquiry and their legal options they may need to see a volunteer adviser. The adviser researches information to help the client with their enquiry, utilising reference books, our computer based information system or by discussing the case with the advice session supervisor. We can also make direct referrals or signpost clients where other agencies are better able to help them.

Our generalist advice service takes a holistic approach to a client's personal situation as opposed to looking at their problems in isolation from one another. The adviser explains information to the client in a way that is easy to understand. This may involve explaining where the client stands on a certain issue; what their options might be and any action they might need to take.

The advisor may also undertake further action for the client – for example writing a letter on their behalf. However, we have a firm principle that a client should do as much as possible to help themselves and not become reliant on our service unless, for whatever reason, the remedy is beyond self-help.

Associated tasks and duties

All the above roles will involve a volunteer also taking on the following tasks, whether on a regular basis or from time to time:

- **Researching information**

A general adviser will often have to research the legal background of an enquiry. This usually involves using our standard reference materials and website but may involve wider authoritative and independent sources of help. Information

Assessors also need to use reference and information material that will most help the client.

- **Giving Information and/or advice**

Explaining all relevant information to the client in a concise and clear manner so that it is easy to understand. This is a vital skill that involves a high degree of empathy and a clear understanding of the information being provided. Volunteers explain where the client stands, what their options might be and action they might need to take.

- **Giving Practical Help**

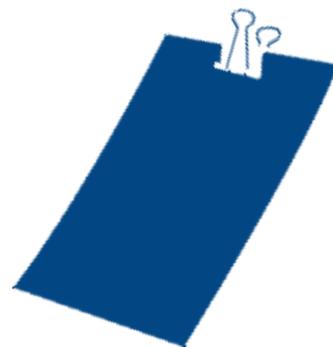
If the client needs help to deal with the problem volunteers will work towards getting it solved. This can involve making phone calls, writing letters, filling in claim forms etc.

- **Case Recording**

We keep a record of the people that have helped and the service that has been given using the Citizens Advice electronic recording system, Petra.

- **Research and Campaigns**

Volunteers are asked to help us spot trends in the problems clients bring to us and to help us collect examples of poor practice. This evidence is used locally and nationally to help influence policy makers to change things for the better. We have a Research and Campaign co-ordinator who can help and promote this important work. Also see below for work more focussed on Research and Campaigns.



Service support roles: administration, reception and clerical

In addition to our information and advice roles, we also offer a number of service support roles. Both types of work are crucial to our services – we cannot operate our service without each type of volunteer.

Admin Assistant

Minimum time: half a day per week

Minimum expected duration: 6 months

Back room staff are essential to our service and the support of volunteer administrators is crucial to all CAP staff and volunteers. All front line workers rely on well-ordered offices where information and resources are well organised and easily accessible. As a volunteer administrator, you would ensure the smooth running of an office by contacting clients via telephone; data entry; checking post in and out; scanning; photocopying, filing etc.

Research and Campaigns Assistant

Minimum time: negotiable

Minimum duration: negotiable

Some volunteers specialise in short or medium term work around research and campaigns projects/work. Research and campaigning is vital as we try to improve public policies and practices that most adversely affect our clients. By collecting evidence from the people we see and feeding it into local or national actions and campaigns, pressure can be applied to make changes that benefit the poorest members of society.

Managed by the research and campaign co-ordinator, research and campaign workers encourage this type of work amongst other workers and helps to collate cases of bad practice.

Interpreting and providing community languages

Volunteers with community language skills can assist our services by providing interpretation support to clients who cannot speak English sufficiently well to understand their rights and responsibilities. All front line workers with community languages are especially valuable as a service can often be given directly to clients without delay.

What support and training will I receive?

All new volunteers will undertake a structured training programme in order to learn about the various aspects of our work and the essential role volunteers play within the advice service. The training will vary depending on the volunteer role you select.

Initial training and assessment is provided in house by our Training Officer via face to face sessions, both individually and in groups, and remotely via our dedicated e-learning package. This can be accessed either by coming into our office or via your home computer giving you flexibility during initial training.

As with most forms of training, learning is enhanced by practice so you will be encouraged to visit the advice service during your training. This will enable you to observe what goes on with the service and, when sufficient progress has been made, start to interact with clients under supervision.

There is an experienced advice session supervisor available whenever the office is open to the public and part of their role is to support the work of all volunteers. Volunteers have regular supervision sessions with an experience member of staff so that you can talk about your volunteer role, how you feel you are doing, any additional training or support needs and any problems you've experienced.

Additionally, our volunteer development officer and training officer are always on hand to offer you support and additional training as required. Volunteers are also invited to attend monthly volunteer development meetings where you have chance to meet up with other CAP volunteers and staff.

Do I need qualifications or experience?

No formal qualifications are necessary to volunteer, but life experience of all kinds is incredibly useful to the Advice Service. You will need basic IT skills, be able to write a letter and undertake simple mathematics. Some confidence using a telephone is also useful.

Can I claim travel expenses?

Travel expenses to and from the Advice Service, or to training courses, are paid. You will find more details of this in our volunteer expenses policy.

Do criminal convictions affect an application?

We are not allowed to accept applications from people with certain convictions i.e. crimes against a child or vulnerable adult. Other convictions may be taken into consideration but this depends on the nature of the crime and when the conviction took place. To talk about this in more detail with a member of our team, please contact us at volunteering@peterboroughcab.org.uk



What we expect from our volunteers

- **Confidentiality**

The information that our clients entrust to us is treated with strict confidentiality, as is the fact that they have made a visit to CAP, and must not be spoken about outside of the Advice Service. Before sitting in on any interviews, you will be asked to read the CAP confidentiality policy and sign a declaration to say you have read it and will uphold it.

- **Equal opportunities and diversity**

We have an equal opportunities and diversity policy which we expect all CAP workers (staff and volunteers) to uphold, and we ask you to help ensure that no one using or working in the Advice Service experiences discrimination.

- **Training**

All volunteers must be prepared to undergo training and work under the supervision of experienced advice workers.

- **Reliability**

Volunteering at CAP is a commitment. It helps us if we can rely on you to be here when arranged or, if this isn't always possible, to let us know as soon as you can if you can't attend one of your scheduled sessions.

- **Time**

A commitment of your time as detailed in the role descriptions.



How do I become a volunteer?

You can register your interest in becoming a volunteer by completing the Expression of Interest form on the "Volunteer with Us" page of our website. You can either download a copy of the form and return it via email to volunteering@peterboroughcab.org.uk or complete the online version of the form.

Once you have registered your interest in volunteering, you will be invited to attend a new volunteer open day at the CAP office in Peterborough. This two-hour session will give you an introduction to our work and how you can get involved as a volunteer. During the open day, you will have the opportunity to complete an application form to become a volunteer with CAP.

Prospective volunteers may be invited to attend an informal interview in person or over the phone following receipt of their application form. The interview is an opportunity for us to find out a little more about you and your reasons for volunteering with CAP.

Successful candidates will be invited to attend a half-day face to face induction day at the CAP office, providing you with an introduction to your volunteer role and the specific training programme you will need to undertake in order to volunteer with CAP.

Work experience placements

CAP is sometimes able to offer work experience placements to students. Full training and supervision is provided for students who complete their work experience placement at CAP. Please contact us for further details or to arrange an initial visit to the CAP office volunteering@peterboroughcab.org.uk

Corporate volunteering

Corporate volunteering (also called employee volunteering) is a really simple and effective way for businesses to contribute to their local community. Companies give their employees an allowance of paid time off annually, which they use to volunteer at a charity of their choice. This enables staff to make a difference in as little as an afternoon, and has incredible potential for community impact. Please contact us if your company is interested in corporate volunteering with CAP

Other volunteer opportunities

If you are interested in volunteering, but are not sure if the Advice Sector is for you, why not look at the other volunteering options available in Peterborough through the [Peterborough Volunteer Centre](#)

You can also find other local volunteering roles on these websites:

<https://do-it.org/>

<https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/>

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/i-want-to-volunteer>

<https://www.volunteercentrefenland.org.uk/>

<https://vivacity.org/vivacity/volunteering/>

<https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/council/jobs-and-careers/volunteering/>



And finally . . .

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with Citizens Advice Peterborough. Our advice service depends on volunteers to deliver this vital advice service to people living in Peterborough and we hope that you've been inspired to join us as a volunteer.

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