



Citizens Advice St Albans District (CASTAD) Information for new volunteers

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:

- Citizens Advice training is well regarded and acknowledged by employers, and is respected and valued throughout the advice sector, as well as a valuable route to self development.
- 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 or learn how to help members of the public with their day-to-day problems.
- 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 is also a chance to put the skills and experience you have to good use helping others. We need people of all ages and backgrounds.

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

Above all, it's a chance to make a real difference. By volunteering for CASTAD 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.

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.

And you won't be out of pocket – CASTAD will cover reasonable travel costs incurred by volunteering (subject to a maximum limit for each office visit).

So, is it time you gave yourself a new challenge?

What does Citizens Advice do?

1. Gives advice

The Citizens Advice Service is independent and provides free, confidential and impartial advice to everybody regardless of race, sex, disability, sexual orientation or nationality. It is the largest advice-giving network in the UK, with over 2,000 outlets and 22,000 volunteers. We help people deal with nearly six million problems every year, face to face at various Citizens Advice locations throughout the UK and at outreach sessions in places like GP surgeries and courts – even in people’s homes; by phone (for example, the Hertfordshire Adviceline service manned by all the local offices) and email via the Citizens Advice Public Site.

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.

Citizens Advice acts 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 (in some cases) represent them at tribunals. Currently we at CASTAD offer help and advice, either face to face or over the telephone, at four locations in the District.

The problems we are most often asked about concern debt, housing, benefits and/or employment, but we will help people who come to us with any enquiry including consumer rights, a family matter or immigration.

Advisers don’t tell clients what to do, but give clients information and 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 Citizens Advice 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.

2. Campaigns for changes in policies and services

We at Citizens Advice 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 pro-actively to prevent similar problems happening to others.

National campaigning

Citizens Advice uses 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.

Local information about the problems that are brought to us (but no personal details about the clients themselves) is analysed at national level. Evidence is collated to help Research & Campaign officers identify national trends. The Citizens Advice can then present evidence to policy makers by writing reports and submissions and participating in consultations to improve policies. The Press also relies on Citizens Advice as an accurate source of information and evidence.

Local/regional campaigning

With local or regional issues, we may act individually or join forces with other offices and outside agencies, using anonymised client evidence to lobby MPs, Assembly Members, councillors, local authorities and others, as well as presenting our findings in the media.

Turning evidence into action

The Citizens Advice Service is respected for its impartiality and independent analysis and is listened to at all levels of government. Councillors, MPs, Assembly Members and Ministers all consult Citizens Advice 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 to make life better for everyone.

For more information about the Citizens Advice, see <http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk> and our own website at www.castad.org.uk.