



# Volunteering Information Pack

## **What does Citizens Advice do? Our Aims & Principles**

Citizens Advice gives independent, impartial, free and confidential information and advice to help people overcome the problems they face, such as benefits, debt, employment, housing, relationships and immigration.

We use our knowledge about our clients' problems to identify trends and campaign to improve the policies and practices that affect peoples' lives.

The Citizens Advice service has 22,000 trained volunteers and 7,000 paid staff in 284 local Citizens Advice across England and Wales who provide an advice service to over 2.6 million people a year in over 2,500 locations in a range of ways including face to face, over the phone, by email and web-chat.

## **What happens at Citizens Advice Sheffield?**

Citizens Advice Sheffield is part of the Citizens Advice network.

We are one of the country's largest Citizens Advice delivering advice and advocacy services to over 27,000 people a year. We deliver services by phone, digitally and face to face, from multiple locations, to some of Sheffield's most vulnerable communities.

## **What will I get out of volunteering?**

Our volunteers come from a range of backgrounds and communities and volunteer with us for a range reasons, including to:

- make a real difference to peoples' lives,
- gain new skills and knowledge and build experience for employment
- use and develop existing skills in varied and rewarding roles
- improve health, wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem
- meet new people from a range of backgrounds and ages, and make friends
- get to know the local community and give something back
- experience good training and support and to feel part of a team

We reimburse travel expenses so you won't be out of pocket from volunteering.

## What we look for

We need people who have a desire to help others and who can make a regular commitment to volunteering. You don't need specific qualifications or experience and our highly collaborative way of working means you'll have a team to support you. You will need to:

- be friendly and approachable
- be able to commit to keeping client confidentiality
- be non-judgmental and respect views, values and cultures
- have good listening skills
- have good verbal and written communication skills
- for most roles have good IT skills
- be willing to learn about and follow our aims, principles and policies
- be able to work effectively as part of a team
- be willing to undertake training to help you with your role.

Citizens Advice Sheffield is committed to equal opportunities and diversity. This commitment extends to our volunteers and we welcome applications from people who represent all of Sheffield's diverse communities. We value difference, and recognise the value that the different backgrounds, skills, outlooks and experiences of our volunteers bring to the organisation.

## What training and support will I get?

All volunteers receive an **induction** when joining Citizens Advice Sheffield. Induction helps you find out about the service, what you will be doing as part of your role and meet colleagues - staff and volunteers.

After induction each volunteer will **follow a learning plan** that is relevant to their role.

Our training is free, comprehensive and high quality. It consists of working through study packs, group and individual learning sessions and opportunities to observe and shadow experienced volunteers and staff.

Throughout your learning, you'll have the **support** of the Volunteer Coordinator and for some roles an assigned Supervisor and a volunteer mentor.

Training is designed to **build your knowledge and skills** in areas that are relevant to your role.

For **Volunteer Advisers** this may include learning about welfare benefits, debt, housing, energy, employment, immigration, discrimination and other areas of public and social welfare law and interview/telephone skills. Training is split into two levels; once an intermediate level is complete you will be able to volunteer in a supporting role before taking on more advanced level learning to fully become a Volunteer Adviser.

All our **training is recognized** by Citizens Advice **and** therefore **transferrable** to any local Citizens Advice.

Volunteers are **fully supported and supervised** throughout their time at Citizens Advice. When you join, you will get more details about who is supporting you day to day, and the specific training you will be doing. We will work with you to help ensure that you find volunteering with us rewarding.

For **Volunteer Advisers**, there is an Advice Session Supervisor/Floorwalker on duty at each advice session to guide and support you. We make sure that you're not put in situations that are beyond your abilities and that there is someone there to support you if you need it.

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

We understand volunteers have many interests and demands on their times. You may work shifts, have caring responsibilities, have a changing university timetable or have regular commitments. We offer a flexible approach to volunteering.

Ideally, we ask for at least **1 day or two half days each week**, for at least 12 months, particularly during your initial learning to help you progress and complete your training.

However, we recognise that this may not always be possible every week and is dependent on what volunteer role you take on. We will talk to you about the volunteering commitment during the application process and any flexible arrangements.

### **What age restrictions are there on volunteering?**

The minimum age for Citizens Advice Sheffield volunteers is 18. There is no upper age limit for volunteers.

### **When / what times can I volunteer?**

Our offices and advice line telephone service is open during office hours (Mon - Fri 10am to 4pm). Roles that involve giving information, advice and support to clients such as a **Volunteer Adviser** will usually require you to be available for a certain amount of hours during these times.

If you work full time and are never available during the day it is unlikely you will be able to train as a **Volunteer Adviser**. However there may be other roles more suited to your availability. Check our current opportunities for more information about other roles or complete an enquiries form to register an interest.

### **Will I get my expenses paid?**

Expenses are paid for volunteers travelling to and from Citizens Advice Sheffield on the day the volunteering takes place, and for any training courses you may attend as a volunteer.

Volunteering with us should not leave you out of pocket. We will contribute to reasonable expenses incurred through training and volunteering including travel expenses and some child care or other care costs. We will chat to you further during the recruitment process about what expenses we can reimburse. Only actual out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.

### **Will volunteering affect my benefits?**

Volunteers who receive benefits, including means-tested benefits, are allowed to volunteer. Volunteering is recognised as giving you a better chance of finding paid work.

It is always a good idea to discuss your volunteering with your benefit agency so they are in the picture and you will need to continue to meet the conditions of your benefits claim.

Because we reimburse only out of pocket expenses, volunteering should not affect your state benefits.

We can help you by providing a standard letter confirming that the role is a volunteer one, the number of hours you are volunteering, that these hours are unpaid and that you're only receiving actual out-of-pocket expenses.

For more guidance see [JSA & benefits rules - Volunteer Centre Sheffield](#)

## **Will volunteering help get me a job?**

Nationally around 30% of our volunteers who leave go on to paid employment. Volunteering with Citizens Advice Sheffield provides skills and experience that is valued by many employers.

Many of our staff, for example managers, case workers and administrators, started out as volunteers.

## **Inclusive volunteering**

Citizens Advice believes that the skills, experience and satisfaction that come from **volunteering should be available to everyone.**

We have a diverse workforce and we **actively encourage applications for volunteer roles from all parts of the community.** We welcome applications from people from all ethnic minority communities, disabled people, people with physical and mental health conditions, LGBT+ and non-binary people.

Citizens Advice has 4 Equity Groups:

- REACH (Race, Ethnicity and Cultural Heritage) Equity Group
- Disability Equity Group
- LGBTQ+ Equity Group
- Trans and Non-Binary Equity Group

Our network groups raise awareness and promote inclusivity within Citizens Advice. The network groups also provide an opportunity to talk and support each other in a confidential environment.

Citizens Advice Sheffield also coordinates a **Cultural Diversity Group** that provides both a safe space for staff and volunteers to share experiences and gain peer support, and also works with the leadership team and board to help shape our progress towards becoming an actively anti-racist organisation.

## **Disabled volunteers**

We want to make sure that you don't feel that your health condition or impairment is a barrier to volunteering with us. We actively welcome disabled volunteers and volunteers with long term health conditions, including mental health conditions.

**Talk to us** at any stage of the recruitment process about what support or equipment would enable you to volunteer with us, including physical requirements or time commitment.

### **Can I volunteer if I am not a UK citizen?**

Please note that you are only allowed to volunteer if your immigration status permits it. Many will, but please do check that you are entitled to volunteer, to avoid breaching the terms of your status. You can find further information about different visa rules on this government webpage. [Visas and immigration - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/visas-and-immigration)

Irish citizens, EU/EEA citizens with settled or pre-settled status, and refugees and asylum seekers are fully entitled to volunteer.

For more information about volunteering as a refugee or asylum seeker visit [Refugees & asylum seekers - Volunteer Centre Sheffield](#)

### **I've recently come to Citizens Advice for help or guidance, can I volunteer?**

Having lived experience gives you really valuable insight into what it's like to come to ask for our help and guidance and could enable you to be an excellent volunteer. If you've received advice about an ongoing or complex issue very recently, we might suggest a short waiting time before you become a volunteer, but we can discuss this with you when you apply.

### **I have other interests, can I still volunteer?**

Occasionally, volunteers may have interests which conflict with the advice service such as a private landlord, current or recent work as a debt collector or a large employer. These do not necessarily prevent you from becoming a volunteer. Please let us know if you think a conflict may apply during the application process.

### **Can I volunteer if I have a criminal record?**

Citizens Advice Sheffield has an ex-offenders policy to ensure that ex-offenders are treated fairly.

Having a criminal record is not in itself a barrier, and we will only take relevant convictions or sexual offences into account. We consider each offence individually, looking at issues like risk to the client, how long ago it took place, the circumstances and whether they are relevant to the volunteer role.

Anyone with a caution or conviction for a sexual offence against a child or vulnerable adult is considered unsuitable to volunteer.

We will ask about unspent convictions as part of the application process. If you're concerned or would like to discuss your individual circumstances further, please contact [volunteers@citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk](mailto:volunteers@citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk)

### **How to apply & what happens next?**

Have you read through the role description/s for current volunteering opportunities to check if this role is right for you?

Have you read through this Information Pack?

If you have any other queries or want to

- discuss individual support or equipment needs
- discuss flexibility around time commitment, or the role
- find out more about the training
- ask us any questions about volunteering!

Please contact [volunteering@citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk)

Otherwise, please complete an application form for the relevant current opportunity.

Once we receive your application, we will get in touch.

Depending on your suitability for the role we will arrange a time to talk. This will be an opportunity for you to find out more about the role, and Citizens Advice Sheffield and decide if you'd like to volunteer with us. It's also a chance for us to find out more about you and to see if the role you're interested in is a good fit for you.

If we are both happy to proceed, we'll invite you to an Induction session.

If the role isn't right for you, we can discuss other opportunities to volunteer either here at Citizens Advice Sheffield or suggest other routes for volunteering.

### **What should I think about when filling in an application form or having a chat about volunteering?**

Try to give clear honest examples of how you meet the requirements of the role, and think broadly; examples could be from a range of things you might have done and don't need to be related to employment experience. Relating the questions to concrete examples of what you've done in the past or how you might approach something in the future is much better than simply saying you can do something.

You don't need previous qualifications or specific experience and will receive training and support to help you be able to carry out the role.

Remember that this is a two-way process. It enables Citizens Advice Sheffield to find out more about you and for you to find out more about the role and us. It enables us to ensure that you are suitable for the role, and it enables you to ensure that the volunteering opportunity meets your needs and interests.

### **Come and join us!**

To get involved, complete an application form - see website for details.

Contact us if you'd like to:

- Discuss a role that you're interested in not currently advertised
- Discuss individual support or equipment needs
- Discuss flexibility around time commitment
- Discuss flexibility around what the role involves
- Find out more about the training

Ask us any questions about volunteering!

We look forward to hearing from you!

### **Contact us**

[volunteering@citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk)