

Becoming an Adviser

Advising with Citizens Advice Wokingham and Woodley

The training for an Adviser lasts 6 months. The first part of the course consists of tutorials, which take place on Thursday mornings from 9.00 to 12.00 at our Wokingham office. In this part of the course you will also need to come into the Bureau for another half day to observe client interviews.

Later in the training you will start giving 'supported' advice under the guidance of an experienced adviser.

In addition you will attend an external training course given by Citizens Advice at an external venue. This will consist of two consecutive training days with one later follow-up day.

You will need to do a certain amount of self-study at home and we expect you to commit to a year's advising work with us after you have finished your training.

What our advisers do

Voluntary advisers deliver most of our in depth advice services to the community. This means working with clients on the wide variety of issues they consult us about every day.

As an Adviser you work in a team with full support from an experienced supervisor, specialists and colleagues. In addition we have comprehensive information and computer support to help you to deliver a quality service.

Specifically an adviser:

- ◆ interviews clients and helps them find a solution to their problem
- ◆ uses our information systems to find the information the client needs to find a way forward
- ◆ helps clients negotiate with people such as creditors or service providers
- ◆ drafts letters and make telephone calls on behalf of clients
- ◆ refers clients to other agencies where appropriate
- ◆ makes accurate case records of work with clients.

When you have more experience you could also represent clients in court and at tribunals.

How much time will it take?

We ask you to contribute a minimum of six hours per week. This could include interviewing clients, follow up work, reading and writing case sheets or letters. You will also need to attend staff meetings and training courses each year.

What about learning more

After you complete basic training, we offer further training on more complex subjects. We also help experienced workers to keep up to date, or to gain more in depth knowledge.

Can I specialise?

As Citizens Advice work has become more complex, opportunities for specialisation have increased. Issues where we frequently offer clients ongoing support - sometimes requiring representation and more detailed knowledge of the law - are:

- ◆ Benefits
- ◆ Money Advice
- ◆ Employment
- ◆ Housing

'Generalist' advice suits many people, as it provides variety. Others gain satisfaction from learning about one area in depth and gaining results for clients from in-depth casework.

How is modern technology affecting advisers?

Citizens Advice Wokingham makes full use of technology, computers and the Internet in order to better serve our clients. We use networked computer systems to access the information we need to give advice; to manage and record details of cases and to communicate with clients and external agencies.

We also want to help more clients by telephone and by email and would be particularly interested in hearing from anyone who wishes to specialise in these.

What do we look for?

As we provide full training, we do not ask for any formal qualifications or experience - although we will of course make good use of your specialist knowledge. The qualities we look for are:

- ◆ Sound literacy and numeracy skills
- ◆ Good communication skills: in person, by telephone and in writing
- ◆ Ability to interact with and respect others from a variety of backgrounds
- ◆ Warmth, empathy and openness

- ◆ Openness to new ideas and willingness to learn
- ◆ Familiarity and willingness to work with modern computer systems (full training will be given)
- ◆ Ability and willingness to work within the aims, principles and equal opportunities of the Citizens Advice service

What will I get out of it?

Each adviser gets different rewards and satisfactions from the work and these can change over time.

Some advisers enjoy making a positive difference, especially for those less able to stand up for themselves. Others enjoy learning new skills – perhaps after being away from work for some years - or the stimulation of learning completely new subjects. On the other hand, others may have specialised knowledge or experience – say of benefits, the law or finance - which they want to harness to new ends. For yet others the satisfaction is about working with people: of helping someone share a problem – perhaps for the first time – and then empowering them to find a way forward.

Most advisers like our Social Policy approach, which means that experience gleaned from individual cases is used centrally as evidence for change. Finally nearly everyone mentions the pleasures of working in a team of people from diverse background who are united in their commitment to give the best possible advice to our clients.

What do I do next?

If you're are interested in applying please telephone us on **0118 978 7258** or email training@citizensadvicewokingham.org.uk or write to The Manager, Citizens Advice Wokingham, Waterford House, Erftstadt Court, Wokingham, RG40 2YF