

# Volunteer stories



Catriona,  
Generalist Adviser  
Argyll and Bute CAB

citizens  
advice  
bureau

## **What were your motivations and reasons to volunteer at the bureau?**

I retired early after 32 years working in the NHS. I was decided that I would not do paid work that early retirees sometimes turn to and that I wanted to do something on a voluntary basis. I saw an advertisement for people to train as volunteer Generalist Advisers at Argyle and Bute Citizens Advice Bureau and decided to give it a go. I felt it would be good to do something of direct use to people in my community.

## **What does your volunteer role involve?**

I volunteer one day per week providing advice by telephone from my home and once a month at Dunoon Foodbank. I live in a remote area, and it would take over an hour to travel to my nearest CAB office so remote volunteering is best for me. As a Generalist Adviser I provide what is usually a first point of contact for clients, so I help them to identify their issues as a first step. Then offer relevant advice and information, discuss options with the client and together we agree an action plan which we can usually support with if needed. Advice queries are varied in Argyle and Bute; renewing driving licences, private water supplies, septic tank problems and all the issues people living in rural communities encounter as well as the more mainstream issues related to energy, benefits, employment and so on.

## **What is the 'stand out' part of your role(s)? In other words, what are the most important, rewarding, or enjoyable part of your volunteering?**

For me, I enjoy working with people, hearing their stories, and working with them to find solutions. I didn't have much understanding about the difficult lives clients talk to us about, because CAB is an independent organisation able to provide confidential and impartial advice, they trust us and have an incredibly positive view of contacting us. They work with you which is great.

## **What are the benefits of volunteering at your bureau?**

Enjoyment. It is rewarding working with clients, I know that there is always excellent support on hand via remote video link, e-mail and telephone and it is a pleasure to work with knowledgeable people, the paid staff, and experienced volunteers.





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**What challenges have you overcome as part of your volunteer journey?**

Since I work almost entirely from home the IT is key. The challenge was setting it up and working out how to use it as effectively as possible in the first instance. There was a remote seminar for myself and some other trainees to help with this and I got things sorted out, it just took a little time and trial and error.

**What skills or knowledge have you gained through volunteering at the bureau?**

Just now I find I learn from every client enquiry. I am still in training, working solo after a period of working with a mentor but having my work checked and assessed. However, the queries are varied, and I expect the learning to continue. I have learnt a lot about benefits and a lot of very useful information about the practical things which impact people's lives.

**What difference do you feel your role/contribution brings to your bureau and community?**

The bottom line is that having volunteer advisers allows the CAB to see the number of clients that we do and to offer the service that we do. We have more clients than could be supported by only paid staff. Also, people know that CAB offers free independent and dispassionate advice which is focused on them as individuals and so they trust us. Also, CAB can deal with pretty much any issue and work holistically so we offer a good starting point even for complex issues.

