

# Volunteer stories



Emily  
Generalist Adviser  
Nairn CAB

citizens  
advice  
bureau

## Volunteer Story

Having recently moved into a new town I was trying to get a document witnessed. Knowing nobody and the Post office being unable to help they directed me to the Citizens Advice Bureau where the Manager was willing to help and witnessed my signature. On the way out she asked whether I would consider volunteering!

On reflection, overnight, I thought it could be an interesting thing to do which would also inevitably mean I would get to know people not only at the bureau but also in the community. I also thought my previous experience in the legal profession would be helpful both for me as an adviser and for the bureau.

I joined at the very end of COVID and as a result my training was online through the Adviser Training Programme and I was soon a Generalist Adviser. This means advising on basically everything which is not at a level requiring referral to one of the specialist teams. The very nature of advising on “everything” has been the most challenging aspect of advising as I became aware of what large gaps there were in my knowledge. Advisernet – the advisers’ “bible” - has all the answers once you find your way around it and if it doesn’t, it points you in the right direction – which is a relief. I tend to enjoy cases with a legal context because of my background and have worked on several employment matters, something which I would like to do more of.

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The challenges have been getting to grips with the two basic systems – the Case Recording systems and Advisernet. I was quite anxious until I was able to feel comfortable with both of them. The other major challenge for me was the world of benefits – something I had never had to deal with or understand before – it is not simple!! Learning that you do not always have to give an instant answer and that there are specialists on hand to guide you, that learning curve has been huge.

Learning about benefits has been a real positive – though I wouldn’t admit to it – as it means you can give more holistic advice. It often seems there is a “what if” question relating to benefits to be found in every issue.





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I have benefited considerably socially as I am transgender and had anxieties as to how I would be accepted by colleagues and clients which has been without exception and to my surprise uneventful. I have gained satisfaction from some of the cases – getting a client her job back having been dismissed – empowering clients to understand they can do things themselves – frustrated when outside systems thwart what clients want to happen. All in all, I am glad the manager thought to ask me whether I wanted to volunteer.

