

Volunteer stories



Susan,
Chair of the Board of Trustees
East Renfrewshire CAB

citizens
advice
bureau

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

It was the right thing at the right time. I had recently taken early retirement from a senior customer relations role when I happened to walk past a poster recruiting volunteers. I started volunteering as an adviser. I found that not only did it keep my mind moving in a similar way to my previous employment, it meant I was helping the community, helping people in adversity and I also got that element of socialization from it as well. I looked forward to going in for my advising sessions. When a change in personal circumstances meant that I could not continue as an advice volunteer, I wanted to retain my involvement with the CAB and became a Trustee before becoming Chair of the Board of Trustees last year.

What does your volunteer role involve?

It would be quicker to say what it doesn't involve! It is oversight of the Board of Trustees and of the bureau. The latter at a high level (not day to day), making sure essential plans and policies are in place and updated when needed. I also view my role as a bridge between the board and the staff and volunteers working in the bureau. I go into the bureau a couple of times a week, as I think it is important to be seen by our staff and volunteers as being interested in what's going on and also at other times for meetings or when there are visits from key stakeholders such as the council. Also, I liaise with our allocated Citizens Advice Scotland Support Manager who advises and updates our board along with others in our region.

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?

I don't think that a Board of Trustees should make decisions from an ivory tower so for me, the most important part of my role is to build a sense of community and be seen and approachable.

What are the benefits of volunteering at your bureau?

It definitely keeps me mentally active and, I feel part of the community; I feel I've got to know the community and the people more as a result of my volunteering.





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

In my career in customer relations, I had worked with people who might be nice but who might also be angry or upset. That helped for advising. As a board, we make some big decisions and that has been more of a learning curve.

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

As part of a CAB board, you contribute to keeping the organisation ticking over and we can be put on the spot by that; I like being able to use skills gained during my working life to ensure that we collectively think things through before making decisions. I think I have developed that approach further and I've become less reactive. I've learnt to have patience; I think I was missed when it was handed out!

What do you feel your bureau brings to your community?

The bureau makes a huge difference to the community. We have been highly effective at getting funding for specialist projects. For example, older people tend to be resilient, they don't look for help and they miss entitlements, so we obtained funding for a project aimed at going out into the community to take information and advice to them. Also, being aware that public transport is atrocious in parts of our community, we ensure we do lots of outreach work. Advisers go out to fourteen different venues across our area. Our advice makes a practical difference to people's lives, last year our bureau achieved 6.3 million pounds of client financial gain and that is money not just in individual pockets but also in our community. Then our volunteering opportunities are also of benefit to the local community. We have just started a project which aims to increase employability through our training, development and volunteering programme and we hope to be able to offer volunteer roles to fit with various career paths. For us this will help to increase our volunteer numbers. However, not all the volunteers we get from this project will be with the bureau long-term as some, once trained, will go on to seek employment elsewhere to the project is very much community-benefit focused.

