

Citizens Advice Edinburgh: training, support and advisory work- a “new girl’s” perspective

January 2010 - dark, cold days; “back to school” nerves; bright and modern facilities for training at Citizens Advice HQ; soon familiar faces and positive personalities of the 19 other trainees.

The January to March training was professional and challenging. It has to be to get us ready to help CAE clients through the maze of issues making life difficult for clients. The trainers, all experienced and skilled CAB workers (staff and volunteers) were almost always amazingly clear, patient and sometimes witty in answering questions or giving examples to help us understand. This was despite naive questions at times from people like me puzzled by complex laws and regulations on areas such as benefits, housing and immigration.

Training sessions were usually lively and stimulating. Chatting with other trainees, a diverse mix of retirees and people in and out of work (lawyers, students, parents on child-rearing career breaks, an event manager, lecturers, voluntary workers, and civil servants), brought me helpful insights. Reassuringly, we all found different issues easy or hard in line with our previous life experiences. At the end of each training session, after the initial chat and farewells, my brain whirred away processing new ideas.

Homework: the training manuals really help consolidate key points after each session and prepare for the next one. They take up a fair amount of time but they are worth it as they grow your confidence and make you at ease with the new jargon world. It has been really good to graduate to using *Advisernet* and accessing instant, expert advice from specialists in the bureau.

After Easter, real clients at the bureau. First shadowing experienced advisers to see their practises. Then going solo but still being able to get help when *Advisernet* does not cover an issue or written references need interpretation.

Constructive support when you need it from specialist advisers and helpful feedback from the omniscient Bureau manager is a reassuring safeguard of quality service for trainees and clients. You never feel left on your own to help clients with their issues. Experienced advisers are companionable and work fast but are never too busy to share their expertise. The workroom is a positive place with lots of banter. All this helps trainees like me learn how to deal with ongoing cases of exploitation of vulnerable people.

CAE training, support and quality control are first class.