

# **Whoever you are, whatever the problem**

The Citizens Advice service and equality

## **Our principles**

The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

## **Our aims**

- Provide the advice people need for the problems they face.
- Improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

Find out more about the Citizens Advice service equality and diversity strategy by visiting [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/equality\\_diversity\\_strategy](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/equality_diversity_strategy)

## **The CAB service ... serves the whole community**

The 412 Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) are right at the heart of their communities. Their services are for everybody.

- In 2008/09, 21 per cent of bureaux clients were disabled or had long-term health problems and 15 per cent were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.
- Single parents, disabled people, people with a long term health condition, and people on means-tested benefit are more likely to have used a CAB than others<sup>1</sup>.
- Many bureaux also provide services tailored to specific groups, such as people with mental health problems, ex-offenders, people with HIV, carers and older people.

## **Advising the Gypsy and Traveller community**

The CAB Community Advice for Gypsies and Travellers project provides dedicated advice, development and advocacy support for members of the Gypsy and Traveller community across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Milton Keynes.

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<sup>1</sup>Figures from Legal Services Research Commission

## **The CAB service ... challenges discrimination**

CAB clients who experience discrimination tell us how devastating it is. And often a discrimination problem can lead to a complex web of issues including debt, homelessness and relationship breakdown.

- In 2008/09, Citizens Advice Bureaux dealt with over 25,000 discrimination enquiries. Citizens Advice Bureaux experienced a 17 per cent increase in employment discrimination enquiries in the past year.
- Every new CAB adviser is trained in spotting and advising on discrimination.
- All bureaux can call on expert legal back-up from our national team of equality and employment specialists.
- A growing number of bureaux offer discrimination casework and representation services.

## **Getting justice for clients**

Newport CAB and the LGBT Excellence Centre in Wales worked together to advise a gay man claiming discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. The tribunal found he had suffered 'grotesquely discriminatory conduct' and made a substantial award.

## **The CAB service ... supports victims of violence**

Abuse and violence is still part of the experience of many CAB clients. Citizens Advice Bureaux support people from all areas and walks of life who face violence, working closely with the police and community organisations where appropriate.

- Over 120 bureaux are hate crime reporting centres, and the same number are members of a racist incident monitoring scheme.
- Last year, bureaux dealt with 18,003 enquiries about domestic violence. A number of bureaux provide specialist advice services for victims of domestic violence.

## **Standing up to hate crime**

Dudley CAB helped their client complain to the police and to the Employment Tribunal, following a violent campaign of racial and religious harassment at work. Three men were imprisoned for the abuse, and the employer made a substantial settlement.

## **The CAB service ... campaigns for equality and human rights**

The CAB service campaigns for changes to policy and practice that benefit millions of people each year. Equality and human rights are at the heart of our campaigns.

- We campaign for the rights of vulnerable workers, including migrant workers, for protection at work.
- Working with mental health and debt charities, we have developed guidelines for lenders dealing with customers who have mental health issues.
- We have argued successfully for more funding to be allocated to advice services for prisoners and ex-offenders.
- Our new 'Equality and Human Rights toolkit' helps bureaux campaign on human rights and equality at a local level.

## **Swimming for all**

Flintshire CAB used the Disability Equality Duty to campaign successfully for free entrance to local authority swimming pools for disabled people's personal assistants and carers.

## **The CAB service .... empowers people through advice**

Good advice helps people take control of their lives. We aim to provide information and advice to more people, in a way which suits them.

- Our self-help website [Adviceguide.org.uk](http://Adviceguide.org.uk) received more than 8.7 million visits in 2008/09, with an increased range and quality of information on discrimination issues. It provides vital information in Welsh and 13 other community languages.
- Through our access programme, we aim to double the number of people using the CAB service by 2011, offering advice online, by telephone and in person, as well as developing an email advice service.
- We work collaboratively with other advice organisations to improve referrals for people with discrimination problems, and to develop information for the public on equality and discrimination matters.

## **Managing money**

More than 12,000 lone parents in England, most of them women, have received CAB money advice and training in managing their finances, through the Barclaycard sponsored Horizons project.

## **The CAB service ... draws on everybody's talents**

The Citizens Advice service is a diverse, welcoming place for staff and volunteers from every background.

- There are 26,000 people working in the service. Twenty thousand of them are volunteers.
- Ten per cent of volunteers are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, and nine per cent are disabled.
- Four network groups provide support and a policy voice for: disabled; Black; lesbian, gay and bisexual; and women staff and volunteers across the service.

## **Involving younger volunteers**

Nearly 450 young people have volunteered for the first time in bureaux across England and Wales, with support from the youth volunteering charity v. Our national youth forum ensures that the CAB service's young people's initiatives are guided by young people themselves. Nationally, 19 per cent of new volunteers in 2007/08 were under the age of 25 years.