



WHAT WORKS

**The Citizens Advice service in
prisons and probation settings**

The CAB service helps people resolve their money, legal and other problems by providing free advice and information. We have a network of nearly 500 bureaux working in over 3,000 locations, including in prisons, probation settings and courts. Bureaux deliver free and impartial advice face to face, as well as by telephone, and by email. We also provide advice through Adviceguide, at www.adviceguide.org.uk, including a series of factsheets specially developed for prisoners.

Citizens Advice is an independent charity, and a membership organisation. Our members, Citizens Advice Bureaux across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, are also independent charities. Together, we are the Citizens Advice service.

The service couldn't survive without help from trusts, lottery funds, companies and individuals.

“I wouldn't have been able to sort out my problems without the bureau. I feel more confident about release now because I know there is help outside’ *Inmate*

It costs **£35,000** to keep someone in prison for a year, but over two thirds re-offend. Prisoners experience the same issues brought to bureaux generally, but have limited access to the means of sorting these problems out. Advice received on arrival and during a prison sentence can help to reduce the risk of re-offending on release.

The CAB service currently provides advice in **43 prisons and 29 probation settings**. Bureau workers give generalist and holistic advice to prisoners on subjects including housing, debt and employment. Bureaux can also access specialist help, for example from solicitors, immigration officers and housing departments.

The service provides offenders with continuity throughout their sentence and on release. Our **CASE system** allows clients' details to pass securely between workers and sites, avoiding the repetition or loss of information. The presence of a CAB in prisons, probation settings and in the community can help an offender anywhere in the country.

Our Citizens Advice staff also work with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) nationally and regionally. For example Citizens Advice chairs five of the Finance, Benefits and Debts strategic pathway groups and is represented on two national reference groups.

The benefits of advice to the individual and community

Citizens Advice Bureaux can provide services to all parts of the prison and probation service – offenders and ex offenders, staff, prisoners' visitors and their families. Breaking the cycle of re-offending by providing support services can save the emotional and financial cost to the individual, their families, wider society and the economy.

The benefits of support and help include:

- advising on rights related to housing matters which contributes to tackling homelessness. Up to one third of prisoners lose their house while in custody, and according to the Social Exclusion Unit 'prisoners who are homeless are more likely to be reconvicted'
- helping to maximize incomes, ensuring benefits are correct and reducing debt problems. Reducing debt brings more money into the local economy, and financial confidence can reduce the risk of re-offending
- ensuring that welfare benefits, debt and education matters do not prevent offenders taking up job opportunities on release
- stabilising family networks
- training in basic skills, such as completing forms and negotiating skills which increases offenders' chances of successful rehabilitation on release
- enabling prison staff to focus on running the service
- reducing social exclusion.

Why work with Citizens Advice?

We:

- are a trusted organisation with a strong national, regional and local infrastructure.
- have evidence of service delivery models which are already effective in prison and probation settings
- work with government and policy makers to improve the lives of everyone in the community
- have links to other potential partners, such as Shelter, the Legal Services Commission and other voluntary sector groups
- provide continuity for an offender throughout their sentence and on release
- can add significant value through the contribution that we can make to the NOMS pathways for action
- have a strong track record of work with offenders, partnership working, managing projects and work on equalities and social exclusion.

“My adviser has done letters to both priority and non-priority creditors ... it's not all been action though: I have had some really good advice about bailiffs and bankruptcy. It's been really efficient and just when I get worried, the adviser rings.” Ex offender, on probation

Citizens Advice uses evidence from bureaux to influence policy makers and government. As a result of our work in prisons and probation settings, Citizens Advice produced a report, *Locked out*, covering the issues faced by offenders. This report is based on our evidence from bureaux working with offenders and on a series of interviews with prisoners. A key outcome of the report showed that investing in advice services to reduce re-offending would cost substantially less than keeping offenders in prisons.

The CAB service is keen to work in partnership with NOMS, the Prison and Probation Services, local authorities and voluntary and community and private sector partners to develop our work with offenders and their families. We believe that this can provide a significant and cost effective way to enable offenders to have access to the advice that they need to deal with their affairs, and that through this we can make a substantial contribution to reducing re-offending.

How the CAB service works with the prison and probation services

A CAB service within prisons

Kensington CAB started running outreach services at Wormwood Scrubs in 1989 and established the full-time service in 1994. Since then, the service has continued with funding from charitable trusts and from the prison service. More funding has been secured from the Legal Services Commission to provide specialist welfare benefits and debt advice.

The two advice workers, supported by a part-time admin officer, interview about 60 prisoners every week. The aim of the project from the outset was, as far as possible, to replicate the CAB service that was available to people on the outside.

A client had been in prison on remand for three months. Prior to prison, he was a carer for elderly parents. While in prison, his daughter was temporarily taking over carer duties. The client's housing benefit had stopped and no rent was paid for three months. He was worried about losing his home and who would look after his parents. The project contacted the council and pointed out that housing benefit should continue if it was likely prisoner would be away for less than 12 months. The council agreed and the benefit was re-instated and fully backdated.

Restorative justice

The Walton Prison Project is a full time service providing services both within the prison and for families in the Visitors' Centre. One of the advisers is based at the North Liverpool Community Justice Centre, a project with its own courts and an emphasis on problem solving both for the offender and the neighbourhood. The CAB offers a specialist service in benefits and debts, as well as general advice. It works with offenders, victims, families of offenders and witnesses who come through the courts and the surrounding community.

A client had been on remand for several months, during which time he was worried that someone was taking money from his bank account. The CAB adviser contacted his bank fraud department and established that the client had been defrauded. The stolen £350 was subsequently re-paid to the client's account.

Reducing offending through advice (ROTA)

ROTA is a collaboration between Citizens Advice North Region, the Prison Service, the Probation Service and the Legal Services Commission. CAB prison advice and development workers are based in the resettlement teams of four north east prisons and provide face to face advice to offenders and their families. Advice is offered to offenders at induction and casework is continued where necessary throughout custody. Videophone links are used to conduct bankruptcy hearings for offenders and also to link offenders with local family law solicitors for specialist legal advice.

ROTA is involved in a successful project that places advice kiosks in prison visitor centres. The kiosks enable offenders' families to access CAB advice and information via the internet.

A client was struggling to find post-release accommodation. The ROTA worker assisted him in making a housing application to his local authority and arranged short-term accommodation. She also negotiated with his previous housing provider to accept small weekly repayments from his prison wages to reduce rent arrears. The client also wanted to re-establish contact with his children. The adviser arranged for him to consult a family solicitor via video link enabling him to access specialist advice without the solicitor having to visit the prison.

Support 'through the gate' – prison and probation

The Citizens Advice Offender Support Service runs telephone-based consultancy and casework support to probation service clients in Kent. Officers can call a CAB consultancy line to discuss their clients' problems or refer them to a CAB adviser. Casework is mostly carried out by telephone or letter, with meetings where necessary at clients' probation offices.

Face to face casework services are held in a number of prisons and probation settings in Kent, Surrey, Sussex and the Isle of Wight. The service aims to work with other partners to provide similar services across the south east.

Janet was referred to Offender Support Services via her probation officer. A victim of domestic violence, she had left her marital home in the middle of the night with her young son. After granting her temporary accommodation the council decided that she had made herself intentionally homeless.

When she came to the CAB she had just three days before she had to leave her flat. The adviser gathered evidence case from the police, social services, probation and her doctor, before successfully persuading the council to keep her in accommodation while her case was being assessed.

Financial literacy

Rugby CAB runs a financial literacy course at HMP Onley. This pre-release course covers money management, including budgeting skills, income maximisation, opening bank accounts, credit unions and bailiffs. It aims to provide prisoners with essential skills and information to enable them to integrate successfully into the community on release.

"I have debt, and that was my main reason for doing the CAB's money matters course. It was brilliant." Inmate

Miscarriages of justice

The Royal Courts of Justice CAB offers a service for victims of miscarriages of justice who often face unique difficulties in readjusting to ordinary life. They may have become institutionalised by their time in prison, and in many cases their problems are compounded by mental trauma, and at the same time they have practical needs, such as in connection with their income, accommodation, etc. This service provides them with advice and support, whether they are in custody awaiting an appeal against their conviction or on release following a successful appeal.

“ The CAB is the best service here;
it’s impartial and supports lots of
people. I’m so glad the CAB exists.”



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