

Citizens Advice Cornwall case study



Our volunteers: the positive impact that Citizens Advice has had is incalculable

'Jake' * volunteered with us for six years contributing massively to our work as well as going on a considerable personal journey, described here in his own words:

When I started volunteering at Citizens Advice Cornwall I had been unemployed for a long time, a university drop out with little in the way of transferable skills and increasingly despondent of my job chances going forward. I was very insular and would rarely exit my bedroom unless I had to go to the Jobcentre or other job search activity.

I have a very vivid memory of my first day at Citizens Advice in Redruth. It was close to disastrous. I had little interest in interacting with others and an attempt at a phone call had me having to hand the phone over very quickly.

Despite this my supervisor was supportive and helped me instead of telling me I was not suitable.

Initially I developed as a Gateway Assistant (doing initial client assessments) and I gradually gained competence. With this came other skills that I had no need to develop previously (waking up on time, being punctual, following instruction). I also gradually gained social skills as I became increasingly comfortable in the office.

As I became more comfortable in the roles that I had it developed into a more involved role. I feel that if I had been given the role of Adviser at the start (or even Gateway Assessor straightaway) I would have drowned in the level of work that was being expected of me.

I am a very different person to the one that turned up in Redruth in October 2009. While a period of 6 years is going to change anybody, the positive impact that Citizens Advice had on my persona is incalculable. I would not present myself, let alone in a positive light. Over time, as I became more comfortable, I slowly climbed out of my shell. I had a poor self-image and I was overly negative of myself. Over time my self-confidence increased.

In job prospects it helped me immensely. While it still took a long time for me to gain a paid position, when it came to job interviews I could actively point to Citizens Advice as examples of me performing skills such as:

- *Computer skills*
- *Working as part of a team*
- *Working on your own*
- *Keeping accurate records*
- *Maintaining confidentiality*
- *Being able to learn new skills*
- *Being in position of responsibility*
- *Telephone skills*

As well as having these skills I feel that Citizens Advice also has credence of being a great organisation so being able to associate my name with Citizens Advice Cornwall has made me a more credible prospect.

* Name has been changed to maintain confidentiality

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