



Citizens Advice Guernsey

Patron: Mr Richard McMahon, Bailiff of Guernsey



NEWS Release

8th November

2021

CITIZENS ADVICE SEEKS NEW VOLUNTEER ADVISERS

A busy local charity has issued a call for more Islanders to volunteer for its advice services over the next few months, as some of its longstanding volunteer Advisers stand down.

Guernsey Citizens Advice is actively recruiting volunteers to become trained Generalist or Money Advisers. Mrs Annie Ashmead, who was a volunteer with the charity until her recent appointment as Deputy CEO, explained: 'Essentially, what we're looking for is the sort of person who really wants to help others, no matter what their situation. We provide free, confidential and impartial advice to around eight percent of Islanders each year, so if you'd like to make a difference then we'd love to hear from you. You don't need special qualifications or experience, just a bit of spare time, some common sense, team spirit and a real desire to help your fellow islanders. We'll provide the rest.'

Mrs Ashmead said that volunteers would train to fill one of two important roles: 'Our most pressing need is for a Money Adviser, to join us as soon as possible. Money creates complex and worrying problems for some people, who become trapped in a spiral of debt that they can't control or even face up to. Our Money Advisers can help them to make sense of their situation so that they get their lives back on track. It's a critical part of our service, which can make a huge improvement to a client's situation. That's a lovely thing to be able to do.'

Citizens Advice Guernsey currently helps clients to manage debts totalling around £4.3m per year. Mrs Ashmead explained the process: 'It begins with an assessment of the client's situation, which highlights any debts that need urgent action. It also aims to maximise income and draw up a budget based on the client's income and expenses. The Money Adviser can then produce a financial statement setting out what the client can afford to offer creditors as debt repayment. This becomes a common reference point to negotiate repayments with individual creditors.'

Mrs Ashmead said that the key requirements for Money Advisers are good people skills and a willingness to negotiate with creditors. She added: 'You'll also have an affinity for people. Money is an emotive subject, so it's essential that Money Advisers are non-judgemental and have a real

empathy with people who find themselves in debt. At the very least that will be causing considerable anxiety and may well have far outstripped their ability to repay. Court action might have been initiated and the client may well be scared. This is where our volunteers can step in and help them try to take back control of their lives.'

Citizens Advice Guernsey is also seeking to recruit Generalist Advisers, to begin training in the New Year. Mrs Ashmead commented: 'Our Generalist Advisers are the public face of the charity. They perform a vital role, working directly with Islanders on a wide range of issues. This makes every day different as you never know who will walk through the door and what their enquiry will be, but you will be equipped to advise them on a wide range of issues.'

Citizens Advice Guernsey deals with more than 11,000 issues each year, covering such areas as housing, legal and family affairs, debt and employment, as well as consumer.

Volunteer Generalist Adviser Dave explained why he joined the charity: 'I wanted to do something in retirement that would benefit others and also allow me to feel that I was giving something back to the community. While some cases can be very challenging and emotional, there is a great sense of satisfaction when a client walks out with a smile and says thank you.'

Volunteer Generalist Adviser Andrew added: 'What makes this so rewarding is being able to assist people who have nowhere else to turn without possibly incurring huge costs.'

CEO of Citizens Advice Guernsey Mrs Kerry Ciotti said that the charity relies on people giving their time to help: 'We are open on weekdays so our volunteers are often either semi or fully retired. A few are now standing down after many years' service, so we need to fill those gaps in order to maintain our level of service. We certainly don't see demand for that falling any time soon.'

Mrs Ciotti added: 'We'd also love to hear from any companies that might wish to explore the possibility of releasing employees to become volunteer Advisers, maybe as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility programme. That could certainly have benefits both ways, as they would gain valuable people skills along with a good understanding of how the Island functions.'

To find out more about volunteering with Citizens Advice Guernsey contact Mrs Kerry Ciotti or Mrs Annie Ashmead Tel. 242734 or email volunteer@citizensadvice.org.gg.