

Broadband Challenge Success for Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice received a prestigious award for its innovative use of IT at the recent Broadband Challenge Awards Ceremony held in the W5 building of the Odyssey, on 31st July 2003. This is a welcome endorsement of Citizens Advice as it enters Phase III of its ICT strategy, which is being supported by the Department for Social Development under the Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme.

John Napier, Director of Information Services and Adrian McLean, Information Technology Officer from Citizens Advice accepted the award on behalf of the

organisation. John Napier, said, "Citizens Advice is leading the field within the voluntary sector with regard to the provision of e-business solutions. It is using ADSL to expand the range of services available to the public with the introduction of e-mail advice and Adviceguide, a public information website which has been translated into seven languages."

The awards ceremony was keenly contested with companies competing in six categories for a place in the United Kingdom finals to be held on 12th September 2003 in London.



John Napier, Director of Information Services, Citizens Advice with members of the Hole in the Wall Gang at the Broadband Challenge Awards Ceremony

Seventeen bureaux in Northern Ireland are now linked via ADSL giving each bureau access to Citizens Advice's Virtual Private Network as well as full internet access. Local offices will now be able to access a greater range of information sources which will complement the services already provided by local CAB offices.

The Chief Executive of Citizens Advice, Derek Alcorn welcomed the award saying,

"We have been pursuing a leading edge IT strategy for the last 6

years, and this award is a timely recognition of the organisation's capacity in using technology to meet social need in Northern Ireland."

Citizens Advice is closely aligned to the E-Government strategy for Northern Ireland and has developed its services so that it will be well placed to directly interface with Government. It is hoped that the developments undertaken by Citizens Advice will be utilised by Government as it gears up to meet the 2005 target of 100% of services being made available electronically.

Staff News

Emma Baldwin, Information & Policy Officer, Citizens Advice

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Views and opinions expressed in Advice are those of the editor or particular contributor, and should not be considered to be the view of Citizens Advice.

Antrim District CAB welcomes Raymond McCready as its new Outreach and Development Worker.



*Raymond McCready,
Outreach &
Development Worker*

Bangor CAB is pleased to welcome its new volunteer advisers Susan Taylor and Jackie McKee.

Coleraine CAB welcomes Marie Wilkinson as its new Benefit Take-Up Worker and Sharon Miller as its Money Advice Worker.



*Marie Wilkinson,
Benefit Take-Up Worker
Sharon Miller,
Money Advice Worker*

Cookstown CAB welcomes Diane Sprake as its new part-time Administrative Worker.

Down District CAB welcomes Liz Pollock as its new Disability Rights Worker.

Falls CAB welcomes its new volunteer advisers Margaret McCann, Liz Beattie and Suzanne Toner.

Fermanagh CAB welcomes Kevin Lawrenson as its new Money, Debt and Community Education Officer.



*Liz Pollock, Disability
Rights Worker*

Larne CAB is pleased to welcome its new manager, Sharon Legg. Joan Robinson is also welcomed to the bureau as Money Advice and Outreach Worker. The bureau also has three new volunteer advisers - Ceira O'Donnell, Julie Cassidy and Irene McGuire.

Magherafelt Outreach welcomes John Craig as a new volunteer adviser and Donna Scullion as its new part-time administrative assistant.

Gerard O'Neill is welcomed to Newry and Mourne District CAB as a new volunteer adviser.

Strabane CAB welcomes Nadine Coyle as its new part-time administration worker.

Newtownabbey District CAB congratulates Maureen Graham on passing her Level 2 Sign Language course. Maureen now has 12 regular clients who are profoundly deaf or hard of hearing.

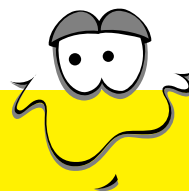


*Anne Marie Marquess,
NMW Information
Officer*

Citizens Advice Regional Office welcomes Anne Marie Marquess as NMW Information Officer and Don McColl as Information Technology Officer.



*Don McColl,
Information Technology
Officer*



Citizens Chatter..

From CAB case notes: Dependant children, aged 75 years.

Advice sector negotiates £600k of Welfare Reform Funding

Derek Alcorn, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice has warmly welcomed the decision of the Social Security Agency (NI) and the Department for Social Development to release £600,000 of Welfare Reform Funding to voluntary advice agencies in Northern Ireland. The funding, negotiated by the Advice Services Alliance (ASA) is a recognition of the additional work which will be generated by Gordon Brown's ambitious programme of Welfare Reform which includes Tax Credits, Pension Credits, payment of benefits

via bank accounts, and reforms to Child Support.

The funding, although small in comparison to the hundreds of millions of pounds available to the Inland Revenue and the Social Security Agency for the overall programme, honours the Government's commitment in the Voluntary Sector Compact to "assess proposed legislation, new policies, and policy changes for their potential impact on the voluntary and community

sector, and to consider where possible the scope for mitigating any unintended negative impact."

The Chief Executive of Citizens Advice, Derek Alcorn has welcomed the funding, "this allows us to explore a mixed economy of provision in the delivery of advice and information to the public on Welfare Reform issues, and an alternative business model by which the Social Security Agency can achieve its service delivery objectives."

Welfare Reform - The Story So Far

Barry McVeigh, Specialist Support Officer, Citizens Advice

In 1998 the Government unveiled a Green Paper on Welfare Reform with the aims of encouraging people to find work, supporting those who could not, and modernising services. Since then a number of substantial changes to the social security system have been introduced in an attempt to achieve these aims. These include, new Tax Credits, Payment Modernisation, reform of Child Support, modernisation of disability benefits, and initiatives in respect of jobs and benefits and Welfare to Work.

As part of the Modernisation of Disability Benefits project, a Disability and Carers Service contact centre was introduced in June 2003. This contact centre will eventually handle all telephone calls concerning Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Attendance Allowance (AA) and Carers Allowance (CA). Contact Centre Staff will be available to complete benefit claim forms over the telephone for customers who wish to avail of this service. However, CAB advisers have experienced a number of problems getting through to the contact centre. In some cases callers receive a recorded message asking them to call back while others have been put on hold for up to 30 minutes before their call is answered. A Document Handling Centre has been set up to handle all incoming and outgoing mail for DLA, AA and CA. Claim forms, medical evidence and other correspondence is scanned into a computer system and directed to appropriate staff. There has, however, been some concern raised around lost claim forms and the ability to retrieve original documentation for social security appeal hearings.

With the introduction of the Pension Credit from October 2003 the Social Security Agency took the opportunity to review how it delivered its services to pensioners. A Pensions Service was created which consisted of two Pension Centres based in Belfast and Derry and a Pensions Adviser based at each local Social Security Office. Advisers have reported difficulties getting through to the contact centre and obtaining supplies of claim forms. Some advisers were also concerned with the level of expertise of telephone staff in the contact centres as some of the advice given had to be challenged by advisers.

Citizens Advice AGM

The Citizens Advice AGM is to be held on Tuesday 21st October 2003 in The Armagh City Hotel, Armagh.

Guest speaker: Mr Dave Wall, Director of the Voluntary and Community Unit, Department for Social Development.

Attendees are given the opportunity of attending workshops in the afternoon session - the workshops available are:

- Quality Assurance - How CAB assesses Quality of Advice;
- Cross Border - Linking the Social Security and Social Welfare Systems North and South;
- Volunteering - Making the most of CAB volunteers;
- Advocacy - What makes a good tribunal representative.

Further information is available from
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11 Upper Crescent, Belfast, BT7 1NT,
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or e-mail scottj@niacab.org

NMW Awareness Campaign Visits Coleraine and Newry

Joan Davis, NMW Information Officer

Citizens Advice has taken to the streets to proactively promote the National Minimum Wage Helpline amongst employers. National Minimum Wage Helpline staff, together with Citizens Advice Bureaux and Inland Revenue staff and volunteers descended on Coleraine to raise awareness of the NMW Helpline and the legislation that enables the minimum wage to be enforced.

Coleraine was chosen as the 'pilot' area due to the high number of calls received by Helpline staff from the area. John Napier, Director of Information Services said, "Citizens Advice is launching this campaign to highlight the plight of low paid workers and to advise employers of their obligations under NMW legislation. We are distributing window stickers for display in business premises. Consumers can therefore be assured that the retailer they frequent is complying with the law."

The Coleraine campaign was successful in terms of local media attention publicising NMW and follow up calls to the helpline from the public regarding non-compliance increased as a result. Coleraine District Council and the local employers showed their support on the day, so with the pilot proving a success it was decided to repeat the exercise in Newry given the recent growth in the retail/hospitality sectors in the City.

Newry & Mourne District Council's Mayor, Jackie Patterson, together with other Council representatives, attended the City Hall to show their support for the campaign. The Mayor stated, "I cannot over emphasise the importance of employers being aware of their obligations with regard to the minimum wage. Communication and the access to information are key elements in this process."

Gabriel Murphy of the Inland Revenue Compliance Unit welcomed the opportunity to visit employers and employees in their place of work with the NMW Helpline staff to explain the role of his unit.

He emphasised the confidentiality of the Helpline and that the facility was available to employers and employees to enquire on all aspects of the minimum wage legislation, "if a worker thinks they are not receiving the minimum wage, they should call the Helpline to seek advice and if paid less than the law states, workers will be entitled to a pay rise and arrears of wages."



Back Row from left to right: Joan Davis, NMW Information Officer, Citizens Advice, Ailish McIntyre, Manager, Newry & Mourne District CAB, Jackie Patterson, Mayor of Newry & Mourne District, Elena Martin, Sinn Fein Councillor, Gabriel Murphy, Inland Revenue Compliance Unit
Front Row from left to right: Anne Marie Marquess, NMW Information Officer, Citizens Advice, Emma Baldwin, Information & Policy Officer, Citizens Advice

Local publicity campaigns will be organised in provincial towns and cities across Northern Ireland throughout the year in order to ensure that local communities are aware of the NMW and their entitlements and obligations under the legislation.

The Helpline is available 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday on 0845 6500 207.

Working partnership with RNID

Derek Alcorn, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice

Two specialist posts have been created in the CAB network to provide advice for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. The posts have been located in Derry and Craigavon, and are the result of a successful joint funding bid to the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity programme by Citizens Advice and RNID (Royal National Institute for the Deaf). Joe McGlade, who previously worked as a volunteer adviser in Dungannon CAB for two years, has taken up post in Craigavon CAB and Ciaran O'Donnell, who has over 7 years experience as a welfare rights worker, has joined Derry CAB.

The initiative builds on the model successfully developed by Suffolk and Andersonstown CAB and Bangor CAB, and entails close co-operation between the two agencies with RNID formally employing the staff and Citizens Advice being formally responsible for their day to day management, the provision of all of the support systems and the quality of advice provided. The project will work closely with local Health and Social Services Trusts and will be formally evaluated.



Joe McGlade,
Craigavon District CAB



Ciaran O'Donnell,
Derry CAB

Launch of Student Finance Guides

www.money2learn.com

Anne Donnelly, Student Finance Adviser NUS-USI

As thousands of prospective students prepare for college life, two unique guides to sources of student financial support have been produced in Northern Ireland. The National Union of Students-Union of Students Ireland (NUS-USI) and its partner - the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA), have launched a comprehensive website and manual to help advisers in their work with students.

The publication and associated website will greatly assist learners and advice workers in explaining how to access sources of financial support. The resources bring together comprehensive information on all sources of student financial support. The website and manual will promote access and widen participation for learners who previously may not have received accurate

and up-to-date advice on funding options.

The website www.money2learn.com and manual were generously funded by the Department for Employment and Learning and supported by many agencies, including the Social Security Agency, Inland Revenue and the Department for Social Development.

The manual and website contains information on student loans, bursaries, tuition fees, social security benefits, tax credits and alternative finance sources. In addition, advice for students with disabilities and students in employment is provided, together with guidelines for advice workers on how to deal with students problems.



Copies of the manual are available by contacting NUS-USI on 028 9024 4641 or by e-mail at info@nistudents.org

Making a Difference

Rose Edge, Money Advice Worker, Antrim District CAB

Mr X had to give up work because of severe arthritis in both knees. His wife was also in poor health. They were living on Mr X's statutory sick pay, a small private pension and Mrs X's retirement pension. Due to a substantial drop in their income they were unable to keep up their financial commitments. They had received a court summons for an overdue rates bill and were being telephoned daily by one of their smaller creditors demanding pay-

ment. The constant worry was affecting their already poor health. The couples combined debts totalled approximately £25,000 and one of the debts was a loan secured on their home.

Mr X and his wife were advised and assisted in applying for Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance. They were awarded these benefits which enabled them to pay their overdue rates bill from the lump sum

received in back payment. This also entitled them to Income Support and full Housing Benefit for Rates. Excluding Housing Benefit their weekly income was increased by approximately £114.

On Mr X's behalf we were able to negotiate an affordable monthly repayment sum for the secured loan and agreed token payments on their three non-priority debts.

Legal Aid Reform The Way Forward

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield KCB, Chairman of The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission

On 28th July 2003 I was appointed by Lord Falconer of Thoroton, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs, to be the first Chairman of the new Legal Services Commission for Northern Ireland. In that capacity I will head a body of 10 Commissioners, with greatly varied talents and experience. We will be served by an experienced staff from the Legal Aid Department, hitherto under the direction and control of the Legal Aid Committee of the Law Society, which will hand over to the Commission full responsibility for the operation of the system on 1st November next. At the helm of the administration will be a new Chief Executive, with a rich background in public sector management. Between now and November the Commission will be operating "in shadow", mastering the detail of current operating systems, making initial contact with those who will be our partners in the future, and laying the foundations for a comprehensive programme of review and reform.

Our task is most fittingly described in the title of the legislation under which we have been established, the Access to Justice Order. This is what the Commission must seek by all available and possible means – to identify the needs of the community, and in particular the most needy and disadvantaged elements of it, for recourse to those remedies and protections which are offered by the law. We must, and we will, work closely with the diverse branches of the legal profession, but our aim must be – with them and their invaluable professional skills – to ensure that no person with a good cause which it would be in both the personal and public interest to pursue is deterred from doing so by lack of means.

At first we will be operating the Legal Aid System much as it is now. Clearly there cannot be a hiatus in a process so important to so many people. But alongside this, we will be setting in hand a comprehensive programme of research upon which we can base new policies and procedures to be recommended to Government. I would expect our local universities to have an important part to play in carrying forward such a programme of research.

The cost of the Legal Aid programme in Northern Ireland is substantial and has been increasing. On the criminal side, it is self-evident that no one at risk of a criminal conviction should be deprived by lack of means from offering an adequate defence. On the civil side, however, our task will be to decide for the future how a finite



Sir Kenneth Bloomfield KCB

sum can be utilised with a proper sense of priority in the public interest. There is certainly no good reason at all why the State should incur expense when an individual is able to cover it from his own means.

It is already clear to me that Citizens Advice and other knowledgeable and experienced advisory organisations will have an important role to play in creating a comprehensive and coherent network of aid and advice across the community. The legal profession will continue to play a crucial role, particularly in terms of representation in the higher courts, but there are many areas in which knowledge of the relevant law and certain forms of representation at tribunals and elsewhere can be sought and obtained from advisory services. My own work some time ago on Criminal Injuries Compensation, for example, emphasised a developing role in this specialist sphere for Victims Support.

Access to justice, will be the end, and partnership the means to meet the genuine needs of the community in this important sphere.

Website breaks new ground for Citizens Advice

Adviceguide is a UK wide self service website incorporating information and advice for the public. The website has been jointly developed by Citizens Advice in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and includes information specific to each of these areas. The service encapsulates all the Westminster Parliamentary legislation, together with particular legislation from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Adviceguide provides information and advice on a 24/7 basis on a wide range of subjects breaking down the barriers of office hours, and putting practical and reliable information at the fingertips of the public.

Importantly, the website is being translated into a range of languages including Chinese, Bengali,

Urdu, Gujarati, and Punjabi. As such it represents a central component of CAB's equality strategy in Northern Ireland and an important electronic interface between citizens and public services.

Derek Alcorn, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice said, "this is government joined up at the point of entry. The development anticipates the strategic objectives which have been set for the delivery of E-government in 2005, and the translation into a range of languages opens up our advice service to a wide range of minority ethnic groups in a way which we hope government will emulate."

The website can be accessed at www.adviceguide.org.uk.



Money Talks Training

Linda Wilson, Money Advice Worker, Dungannon CAB

For a number of years now Dungannon & District CAB has organised an outing for staff to celebrate Volunteers Week. Volunteers week 2003 saw volunteers and staff travel to Donegal to undergo some personal development training.

The bureau availed of Northern Bank sponsorship for a local community arts group to facilitate this training which was aimed at enabling the team to deliver the new Money Talks resources in their local community. The Money Talks resources have been developed to support young people in Northern Ireland to improve financial skills and help prevent them from getting into debt in the future. They provide a comprehensive guide for CAB volunteers and staff to deliver financial education within the new Northern Ireland School Curriculum commencing in September 2003.

Keith Stanyer, Manager of Dungannon CAB, said, "We are expecting a high demand from schools in the Dungannon area. It will be great to have a pool of trained staff and volunteers who now feel confident in delivering the Money Talks resources."

Dungannon bureau has developed a partnership with its local Northern Bank branch which will involve co-delivering the resources in local schools, providing a skills and knowledge mix from both the voluntary money advice and the business sectors.

For more information on the Money Talks project contact Kelly Collins, Volunteer Development Officer, Citizens Advice on 028 90231120 or e-mail collinsk@niacab.org



Bureau News

Siobhán Harding, Information & Policy Officer, Citizens Advice

- Ards CAB** has received confirmation of funding from Ards Health and Social Care Group.
- Armagh CAB** has received funding from the Armagh Community Safety Operational Partnership. The funding is to be used for the minor refurbishment of the bureau, for publicity and to develop a website for the domestic violence drop in centre based in the bureau.
- Coleraine CAB** is preparing for the launch of the Garvagh Rural Advice Centre pilot project involving Age Concern, Women's Aid and Coleraine CAB. The pilot service will run for 6 months starting the first week of September.
- Cookstown CAB** delivered a 3-day information and one-to-one advice clinic at Desmonds in Omagh. The bureau is continuing its weekly information slot on Mid 106FM where advisers from Cookstown and Magherafelt provide information and advice on a variety of subjects.
- Larne CAB** has had its core funding from Larne Borough Council increased.

Fond Farewell to Joe Wright

In June the Board of Citizens Advice made a formal presentation to Joe Wright who retired from the Voluntary and Community Unit earlier this year. Speaking at the presentation Derek Alcorn, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice said, "we worked with Joe from 1995, when the Voluntary and Community Unit took over the grant aid for the advice sector in Northern Ireland. Joe had a very good understanding of the contribution which the voluntary sector makes, and we found him to be consistently helpful in his advice and very responsive on a wide range of issues over many years. Citizens Advice is very pleased to mark his retirement and to wish him well for the future."

Back Row from left to right: Dave Murphy, Citizens Advice, Una Buchanan, Citizens Advice, Marcus Duignan, Chair, Citizens Advice
 Middle Row from left to right: John Napier, Citizens Advice, Janette Walker, DSD, Dave Wall, DSD, Derek Alcorn, Citizens Advice
 Front Row from left to right: Joe and Janice Wright



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- ✓ All communities should have equal access to health care
- ✓ All communities should have equal rights
- ✓ It is important to work together and there is a need for support to bring about change

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- A monthly information bulletin (Health Bytes)
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- An information resource
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- Shared information and support — networking opportunities
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- Participation in management committee and network activities
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TO JOIN

If you would like to join, or would simply like more information, please contact Kathy McArdle on 028 3026 4606 or e-mail info.cdhn@btconnect.com www.cdhn.org

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