



# Minimum Wage

## Northern Ireland takes 10% of UK Arrears with 3% of the Population!

Joan Davis, Information Officer, Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice in conjunction with the Inland Revenue Compliance Unit has successfully identified £1 million of arrears for low paid workers in Northern Ireland since the introduction of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) in April 1999.

Jo Wakeman, Head of Operations for NMW, Inland Revenue said: "I am delighted that we have achieved such a notable landmark in our efforts to ensure that workers in Northern Ireland receive what they are entitled to be paid. This result shows that our partnership with Citizens Advice is achieving its objectives of raising awareness of national minimum wage issues and providing workers and employers with an independent and confidential point of enquiry."

This figure shows that proportionally more arrears have been identified in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom. With only 3% of the population and 10% of the arrears it is clear that employment practices in Northern Ireland still



John Napier, Director of Information Services, Citizens Advice is presented with a £1,000,000 cheque in arrears for low paid workers by Gabriel Murphy, NMW Compliance Unit Officer, Inland Revenue

need to be improved. Citizens Advice hopes that through the helpline it can educate employers, identify arrears and assist those not receiving their correct entitlements under the NMW legislation.

For many employees in NI who are not receiving the statutory minimum wage the reality is that they are frequently denied other statutory rights and the fear of victimisation often prevents action being taken. The helpline has identified a number of worrying trends - many callers are being denied other employment rights, such as adequate rest

breaks, the right to paid holidays, statutory sick pay and issues around health and safety and discriminatory practices.

The success of the helpline may be partly attributed to the fact that the worker retains his/her anonymity and is assured that personal details are strictly confidential and the employer is not aware of how an investigation is instigated. When the compliance team investigate a place of employment all employee records are checked, and as is so

often the case, any shortfall in pay affects more than one worker, therefore, arrears are applicable to all who have been denied the minimum wage.

The National Minimum Wage Helpline operates from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday on 0845 6500207. All calls are confidential. The service also has a translation facility available in over 100 different languages. To enable all sections of the public to access information, literature is now available in Portuguese, Arabic and Cantonese.

# Staff News

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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.*

Natalie Strain, Information and Policy Officer, Citizens Advice

Antrim District CAB welcomes new volunteer Iris Russell to the bureau.

Ards CAB wishes to congratulate June Gilmore who takes up the post of Assistant Outreach Worker.

Armagh CAB congratulates Mary Curran on becoming a Senior Telephone Adviser.

Bangor CAB wishes to welcome back Zoe Mageean as its administrator. Zoe returns to the bureau after the birth of her daughter Ciara.

Sinead Campbell joins Cookstown CAB as a new volunteer adviser. Magherafelt Outreach also welcomes Damien Gallagher and Paul Grant as new volunteer advisers.

Fermanagh CAB wishes to congratulate its eleven volunteers from the Outreach Development Project who recently completed the ATP course.

Newry and Mourne CAB wishes its new volunteer adviser Colin McKee well as he starts the ATP course.

Newtownabbey District CAB welcomes its new money advice worker Roisin Klocker who is to be based in Glengormley CAB and Tracey Stewart, a new volunteer adviser with Rathcoole CAB.

Strabane CAB welcomes back to the bureau George Kirk as a volunteer adviser.

Citizens Advice Regional Office welcomes Joan Davis to the National Minimum Wage Helpline and also Adrian McLean as Information Technology Officer.



*June Gilmore,  
Ards CAB*



*Mary Curran,  
Armagh CAB*



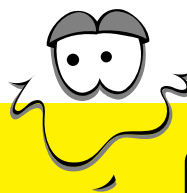
*Roisin Klocker,  
Newtownabbey District  
CAB*



*Joan Davis,  
National Minimum  
Wage Helpline*



*Adrian McLean,  
Information Technology  
Officer*



## Citizens Chatter..

Client: (reading out National Insurance Number): HM 12 34 56 D

Adviser: Is that D for Dog?

Client: Oh, I don't know what it's for!

# New look 'Advice'

Siobhán Harding, Information and Policy Officer, Citizens Advice

New Year, New Look.....Advice magazine now has a new image, after over four years in its traditional yellow and blue. The new style and colouring reflects the modern and dynamic vision of Citizens Advice Northern Ireland. We hope that you enjoy reading the new look 'Advice'.

## Improving Customer Service

Barry McVeigh, Specialist Support Officer, Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice and AIAC have joined together to work with the Social Security Agency (SSA) on a review of its customer service procedures. Barry McVeigh, Citizens Advice and Conor McGale, Omagh Independent Advice Centre have been seconded on a job-share basis for six months to undertake a research project aimed at identifying good practice models and highlighting areas for improvement.

The objective of the research project is to maximise the opportunity and contribution the advice sector can make to help identify



*Barry McVeigh, Citizens Advice and Conor McGale, Omagh Independent Advice Centre on secondment at the SSA.*

improvements to SSA services and to enable the agency to take a 360 degrees view of its service provision. It is envisaged that this project will help break down barriers to improvement, promote greater communication, sharing of information/best practice and develop a local infrastructure for the delivery of SSA services.

The secondments provide an excellent opportunity for collaboration between the voluntary sector and the SSA for the benefit of our mutual customers.

## Bangor CAB launches Deaf Project

Oonaugh Harris, Manager, Bangor CAB

Bangor CAB is offering advice to the profoundly deaf and hard of hearing with the aid of a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter.

The project allows the bureau to offer two-hour sessions weekly to the deaf community and has provided funding for a loop system, minicom, fax and e-mail service.

The project is a joint initiative between Bangor CAB, RNID Northern Ireland and the Ulster Community and Hospital Trust: Sight and Hearing Team. It has been in operation since September 2002 and has highlighted the communication barriers experienced by deaf people in their daily lives when attempting to access services.

It is not widely appreciated outside the deaf community that sign language is often the first language of the profoundly deaf. As a result written English is a foreign language to many deaf people.

The presence of an interpreter combined with trained CAB advisers has meant that the service is now in danger of being overwhelmed by the growing demand.

It is hoped that the application for further funding will enable the bureau to continue with this project.



*Mrs Coralie Heron, availing of the Bangor CAB Deaf project and Mrs Rosie Budd, RNID Signer.*

# Citizens Advice: Quality through Training

Genevieve Murphy, Training Officer, Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice celebrated learning and individual achievement in December 2002 by presenting certificates to staff members. The organisation presented its first National Vocational Qualifications Certificates in Advice and also paid tribute to its adult learners by presenting N.I. Open College certificates to those who had successfully completed the Organisation's "Adviser Training Programme" and University of Ulster certificates for "Social Security Advocacy" training. The event brought to fruition the organisation's training strategy to link work based learning activities to accredited training.

Citizens Advice became an NVQ assessment Centre in September 2000, approved to deliver vocational qualifications in advice to its volunteer staff. Citizens Advice also delivers programmes of learning accredited by the N.I. Open College Network and the University of Ulster (BA/BSc Combined Studies Degree).

Benefits of the accredited training strategy for the organisation's volunteer staff are numerous. The programmes combat common barriers to participation by providing flexible learning opportunities to Adult Returners, increasing confi-

dence and self-esteem and providing volunteer staff with current and transferable skills for future employment and career progression. The event, attended by some one hundred volunteers and staff members confirms the important role of Citizens Advice within the voluntary sector in the provision of recognised qualifications and the development of an effective organisational culture of lifelong learning.

The development of the training activities of Citizens Advice has been supported by partnerships funded by Northern Ireland Electricity and Tudor Trust and by the organisation's core funders, the Voluntary Community Unit of the Department for Social Development.



*Back Row - Billy Graham (NIE), Derek Alcorn (Chief Executive, Citizens Advice), Dave Wall (Director Voluntary and Community Unit, Dept for Social Development).*

*Front Row - All receiving NVQ Certificates in Advice Marie Gilmore (Volunteer Adviser Cookstown CAB), Evelyn Madden (Volunteer Adviser Antrim CAB), Marian Doherty (Volunteer Adviser Antrim CAB)*



*Back Row - Billy Graham (NIE), Derek Alcorn (Chief Executive, Citizens Advice), Dave Wall (Director Voluntary and Community Unit, Dept for Social Development), Marcus Duignan (Chair, Citizens Advice)*

*Front Row - All receiving Social Security Advocacy Certs - Brenda Kearns (Adviser Derry CAB), Siobhan Edgar (Outreach worker, Craigavon District CAB), Marie Gilmore (Volunteer Adviser, Cookstown CAB)*

# Collecting Benefits at Post Office™ Branches

The Post Office™ is the largest retail chain in Europe. With around 600 branches in Northern Ireland, the UK network is larger than all the main banks and building societies put together.

The Post Office™ has been developing its banking services to ensure that people can still enjoy the convenience of collecting their pensions and benefits at Post Office™ branches when the Government begins phasing out order books and paying benefits directly into bank accounts from April 2003.

Customers in Northern Ireland who want to continue using the Post Office™ to collect their cash, free of charge, have the option of either opening a basic bank account – available from each of the main banks – or choosing a Post Office™ card account.

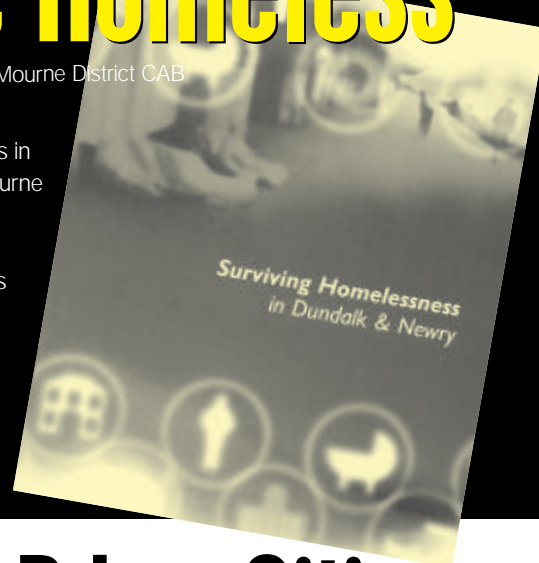
The Government is responsible for managing the changeover to direct benefit payment and for communicating with customers over transfer arrangements. Staff at Post Office™ branches will, however, be happy to talk you through the various payment options and to provide you with the help necessary to guide you through the changes.

# Advice for the Homeless

Ailish McIntyre, Manager Newry & Mourne District CAB

The rise in the number of young people who find themselves homeless in the border areas of Newry and Dundalk has prompted Newry and Mourne District CAB, Dundalk Citizens Information Centre and the Youth in Partnership project in Dundalk to publish an information booklet "Surviving Homelessness in Dundalk and Newry". The booklet informs young people seeking support about services available to them in this region.

Copies of the booklet are available from Newry and Mourne District Citizens Advice Bureau, on 028 3026 2934 or via e-mail at [newrycab@niacab.org](mailto:newrycab@niacab.org)



## Argyll and Bute CAB buy Citizens Advice Case Recording Database

Lorraine McAllister, Information Technology Officer, Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice in Northern Ireland has long been at the forefront of technological advances and has recently developed and installed a new electronic case recording system across the whole Association. The new case recording database has now also been successfully installed in Argyll and Bute CAB in Scotland. The decision to purchase and implement the database followed a demonstration to key Argyll and Bute CAB staff. This represents a major expansion of the use of the case recording system as Argyll and Bute CAB has a number of different outlets. Although the decision to purchase the database was taken by Argyll and Bute CAB, Citizens Advice Scotland is also

very interested and intend to monitor its introduction with a view to gauging the impact of electronic case recording on the efficiency of advice work.

Argyll and Bute CAB bought in the expertise of Citizens Advice and Sx3 staff to implement the database. Citizens Advice provided on-site user training for the system. Helen Timbrell, Manager of Argyll and Bute CAB, commented:

"The session was a great introduction to the electronic case recording system which is vital to the development of the Argyll and Bute service. The day provided us with all the information we needed to start working with the database and was delivered in such a friendly and supportive way it made it easy for us to ask questions when we needed to. Argyll and



From left to right: Kate Dunbar, IleTec IT Consultancy, Jean Nicholson, Oban Trainee Volunteer Adviser, Kate Harvey, Campbeltown Volunteer Adviser, Helen Timbrell, ABCAB Manager, Geraldine Day, Training Support Officer, Dr Jim Shimmins, Helensburgh Volunteer Adviser, Lorraine McAllister, IT Officer, Citizens Advice

Bute CAB is looking forward to piloting this database for Scottish Bureau and working closely with Citizens Advice as our service develops".

Citizens Advice is delighted to have been involved in this project. The Citizens Advice case recording database was developed over a two-year period with a high level of input from bureaux staff. The database has been in use in all CAB in Northern Ireland for over one year. It has contributed to the provision of a more effective advice service and the ability to provide a better profile of casework.



Argyll and Bute say "moooooo-ve to Citizens Advice's case recording database!"

# Comhairle

## Information for All

Comhairle is the national agency in the South responsible for supporting the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy to members of the general public on social and civil services. It was set up as a new agency in June 2000 as part of a government mainstreaming policy designed to ensure that services for people with disabilities are provided by the same agencies that deliver services to the whole community. Comhairle was formed from the merger of the former National Social Services Board (NSSB) and relevant parts of the former National Rehabilitation Board (NRB).

As a statutory agency, Comhairle comes within the remit of the Department of Social & Family Affairs. A Board of 20 members is appointed by the Minister of Social & Family Affairs, of which five are nominated by the Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform. Comhairle has a regional structure with five regional offices and nine local offices in addition to its head office located at Hume House Dublin.

One of Comhairle's main tasks is to source, produce and integrate information on social and civil services. It then makes that information available to the public in a number of different ways:

- Through the nationwide network of 85 full-time and part-time Citizens Information Centres, which are voluntary bodies managed by Boards or Management Committees and directly funded and supported by Comhairle. The network of CICs dealt with over 468,000 queries in 2002.
- Through the new nationwide Citizens Information Call Centre, a lo-call citizen information service, managed by a voluntary Board of Management and directly funded and supported by Comhairle.
- Through its databases
  - the Citizens Information Database (CID) provides up to date information on all aspects of rights and entitlements and is primarily aimed at information providers. You can access the CID at [www.cidb.ie](http://www.cidb.ie) or via the Comhairle website at [www.comhairle.ie](http://www.comhairle.ie)
  - OASIS (On-line Access to Services, Information and Support) is a new approach to public service information on the Internet developed by Comhairle as part of the eGovernment programme in the South. Information is structured around key life events which makes it easier for the individual member of the public to use. In time, OASIS will act as a gateway to services and people will be able to do business with public services by applying for payments or making returns over the Internet. OASIS can be accessed at [www.oasis.gov.ie](http://www.oasis.gov.ie) or directly from Comhairle's website.
  - We are currently working on a project to integrate the OASIS and CID databases.
- Through working in partnership with a broad range of voluntary and statutory organisations who are involved in the provision of information.



*Leonie Lunny,  
Director Comhairle*

Another key function of Comhairle is to influence policy developments by highlighting the concerns of service users as to the effectiveness of social and civil services. We publish regular Social Policy Reports that address social policy concerns identified by the users, and providers, of Citizen Information Services. The recently launched Report Supporting Carers highlights the situation and needs of family carers in the South, while we will shortly be launching in conjunction with Threshold a Social Policy Report called Rent Supplement.

Training and development support for information providers is a very important activity for Comhairle and is provided to a wide range of agencies including CICs, the Citizens Information Call Centre, MABs (Money Advice & Budgeting Service) as well as other voluntary and statutory bodies. During 2003 we will be putting in place more regionalised responses to the training needs of Information Providers and the appointment of a part-time post of Regional Training Executive in each region will contribute to the process of being able to respond to identified training needs on a more regional and local level. Centrally, Training & Development continues its work in developing nationally accredited training for Information Providers.

Comhairle continues to work jointly with Citizens Advice on a number of fronts – following on from the joint involvement in the Trasna cross-border project, Spring 2003 will see the formal commencement of a new 'Borderwise' project which has involved considerable collaboration between the two agencies during the application stage. The on-going interaction between Comhairle and Citizens Advice in developing a cross-jurisdictional information and communications strategy continues and will be an important element of the support to staff in CICs and CABx engaged with the work of the 'Borderwise' project.

In addition, staff of Citizens Advice have recently contributed to a number of Comhairle/CIC Joint Working Groups focussing on key service aspects for CICs – Dave Murphy to the Quality/Service Standards group, John Napier to the Data Collection group and Barry McVeigh to the Advocacy group.

We look forward to continuing and further developing the positive relationships between Citizens Advice and Comhairle, between CICs and CABx and between other information and advice providers in both jurisdictions.

# Making a Difference

Brenda Kearns, Disability Advocacy Worker, Derry CAB

A client with mental health problems who was in receipt of DLA middle rate care, low rate mobility and Incapacity Benefit approached Derry CAB for help with his debt problems. The client had been regularly attending meetings with a Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN). The client then moved house and informed his CPN but his file was not updated.

Incapacity Benefit branch then asked the client to attend a medical and sent the letter to his old address. They contacted the CPN who informed them that the client had not been to his last few appointments. The client was not getting letters from the CPN as they were sending them to his old address. The client's Incapacity Benefit was stopped as he failed to attend his medical.

DLA sent an EMP out to his home to conduct a medical. The EMP stated that if the client had not been to see his CPN his situation must have improved and subsequently awarded him DLA low rate care, low rate mobility. The client lost his Severe Disability Premium and Income Support.

The client's income dropped so much that he presented at the bureau with debts of £2,500. He could not manage his affairs since his benefit had been reduced. The client had suffered many problems at Christmas and had suicidal tendencies which were related to his inability to cope with his money problems.

The bureau contacted the Community Mental Health Team and they provided the client with a letter confirming they had made an administrative error. The adviser then contacted Incapacity Benefit branch with this information. Incapacity Benefit branch reinstated the client's benefit without going to a tribunal.

The bureau is now working with the client to get his DLA reinstated and on reducing and managing his debts.

# New Domestic Violence Drop-in Centre at Armagh CAB

Mary McGinn, Manager, Armagh CAB

Police in Northern Ireland attended over 14,000 incidents of domestic violence in 2001-2002. These figures show an obvious need for support and advice for those suffering from domestic violence. Armagh CAB has responded to this need by working in partnership with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Women's Aid to develop a Domestic Violence Drop-In Centre in Armagh CAB.

This unique partnership offers a one-stop-shop to help people experiencing the use of or threat of violence or abusive behaviour. The service will run every Wednesday from 2:00pm - 4:30pm offering advice, information and continuing support for people experiencing domestic violence. In addition to the drop-in centre a 24 hour helpline is also available on **028 3752 8706**. The service is free and is available to all who need it regardless of their race, sex, sexuality, culture, income or beliefs.



*Pictured at the launch of the drop-in centre are from left to right: Brian Gilbert, CAB Treasurer, Mary Curran, Armagh CAB Senior Adviser, Mary McGinn, Manager, Armagh CAB, Superintendent Bob Moore, PSNI, Rosemary Drainey, Women's Aid and Lisa Clydesdale, Women's Aid*

# Bureau News

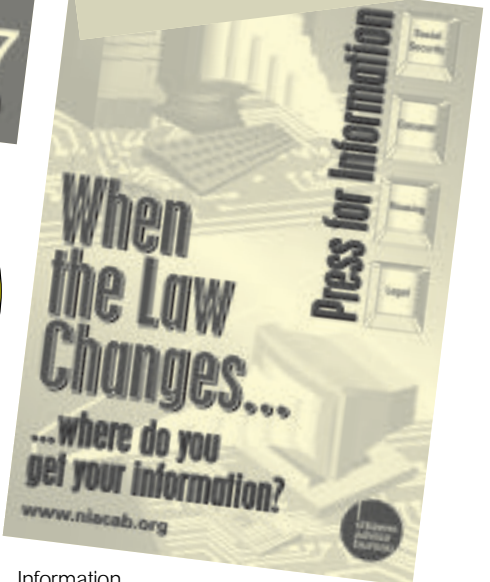
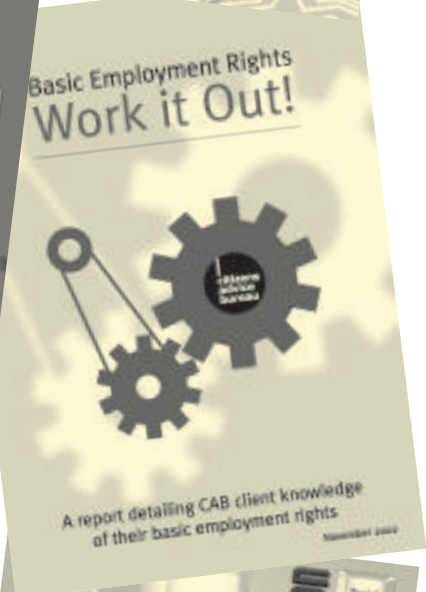
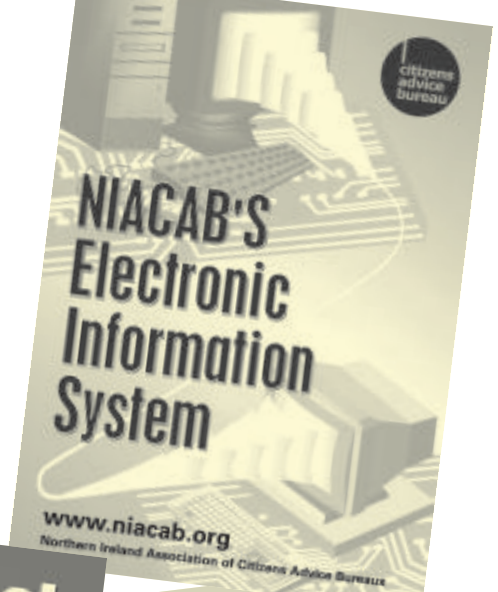
Natalie Strain, Information & Policy Officer, Citizens Advice

**Antrim District CAB** received a contribution towards its outreach clinics in Randalstown, Crumlin and Toome from the Northern Health & Social Services Board. The bureau also held a quiz in 'The Stables', Antrim. Over £400 was raised and a great - if late - night was had by all!

**Coleraine CAB** received funding from the Northern Health & Social Services Board towards benefit uptake in the Coleraine area.

**Cookstown CAB** also received funding from the Northern Health & Social Services Board to continue the bureau's extended opening hours.

**Fermanagh CAB** put in an application for funding in partnership with Fermanagh District Council, Fermanagh Trust and the Youth Service of the Western Education and Library Board. The bureau was successful in its application and was awarded funding towards the employment of a money and debt adviser. This post will provide money and debt advice but will also be proactive though education. It will involve a Community Education Programme around the issue of debt and will work with schools, colleges and community groups to raise awareness of debt issues among the young and try to prevent the problem.



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Quarter page, half page and full page advertisements can be taken out and rates are available by telephoning Jacqueline at Citizens Advice on 028 9023 1120 or by e-mail on [scottj@niacab.org](mailto:scottj@niacab.org)

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