Memories to mark 75 years of Citizens Advice in



Uncovering 75 years of County Durham's social history

The first Citizens Advice opened in County Durham on 13 September in 1939 with offices in Durham city and Crook.

Helping mark the milestone event is the news that Citizens Advice County Durham (CACD) has been awarded £9,300 through HLF's Sharing Heritage programme to uncover how its users, and their issues, have changed over the decades.

CACD chief executive Neil Bradbury said: "This is not just about the history of the charity but also the social past of the county and understanding how people's lives have changed over the years. This project will chart the changes in people's problems and role the charity has played. For 75 years it has been a cornerstone for those in need of advice with close to a million people coming through our doors.

"We have seen some key developments this year opening new premises in County Durham and it is a fantastic time to capture our history and collect memories and stories of the CACD over the years."

Dating back to 1939, old clippings held by the Durham Records Office shed light on the array of problems early volunteers and staff were faced with.

From the gentleman wanting a list of eligible maidens in the parish, to the lady struggling to meet hire purchase payments for a fur coat and the man injured during army work but refused compensation, the charity has been on hand to help with any query.

An archived newspaper report from the early days of the charity was in no doubt the important role the CACD would play, stating: “I do not think it will be long before the initials CAB will be familiar to a wide public as a symbol of sound, expert, impartial advice on personal and domestic subjects.”

Since then millions of people in County Durham have turned to the charity for support through the major social and economic changes of the past seven and a half decades from housing shortages in the 1950s, sexual revolution in the 1960s and unemployment in the 1980s.

The charity is now appealing for former staff and volunteers, as well as those it has helped, to come forward with their memories for the year-long research project.

The stories and records of the CACD will form the basis of a book providing a snapshot of social history in County Durham. The findings will also be exhibited at various community venues and museums across the county in 2015.

Marjorie Fitzgerald, one of the CACD’s longest serving volunteers, said: “The values of Citizens Advice are the same today as they were 75 years ago. We offer free, impartial advice no matter what the problem and remain the go-to charity for people in need of support.”

Ivor Crowther, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: “We’re delighted to be able to support CACD as it marks the 75th anniversary of the organisation. The project offers to bring to light a rich and very personal narrative of life in County Durham and it will be incredibly interesting for many to see how the issues people face have changed – or indeed how similar they might be!”

Questions brought to CACD over the years (dating back to the 1940s) have included:

- What are the by-laws concerning the employment of children?
- How can I get a loan for a fish and chip shop?
- Where would one start looking for a sailor son who deserted his ship in Australia?
- Can I have a free bike to visit my evacuated wife and family at the weekends?
- I have a cat and my neighbour keeps pigeons, what should I do?
- A woman seeking help with hire purchase payments for a fur coat
- A 90-year-old woman wanting to know where she could get a pair of spectacles
- Do you keep a list of eligible maidens in the parish?
- People wanting to contact prisoners of war or relatives in occupied Europe
- Do you have information on “reasonably priced accommodation for a weekend honeymoon in Durham City?”
- A dispute over paternity

Notes to editors

About Citizens Advice County Durham

- Earlier this year the Citizens Advice County Durham merged to take in former Citizens Advice Bureaux from 10 towns across the county
- In 2013 the County Durham branch of the charity supported 20,000 people with free, impartial advice

- The top five issues for County Durham residents visiting Citizens Advice in 2013 were benefits and tax credits, debt, housing, employment and relationships and family
- Citizens Advice was originally formed in September 1939 with branches often run by volunteers from public buildings, private houses and horse boxes

Further information

To arrange photo opportunities, further interviews or for more information please contact Kerry Wood at Noted PR on 07576 874 004.