



# TACKLING DISCRIMINATION

How Citizens Advice can help you

**A**bout a year ago, a young Brazilian client, based in London, went to his local Citizens Advice bureau in South West London. He said he had lost his job as an administrator for a local healthcare business, and he felt it was all due to the fact his boss was racist.

He was consistently told by his immediate boss to “*go back to Brazil*” where he came from, and that he was “*a bl\*\*dy foreigner*” and did not speak proper English.

As advised by a colleague, he complained to the company human resources, but as soon as he had done so, the insults became worse and his boss’s son, who also worked at the company, also began to abuse him verbally. Finally, a few weeks after his complaint, he was made redundant with no pay and no warning.

Our client’s story is a sad one, not least because such scenarios are told to us every day at Citizens Advice.

Luckily, in this case, we helped this client take his employer to court, and this year, he was awarded over £87,000 pounds in compensation. But worryingly, not everyone knows when they have been discriminated against, or that it’s unlawful, or that they can get help about racial and other discrimination issues.

While its true anyone can go to a Citizens Advice bureau to get help about housing, debt, consumer and employment issues (last year, we helped people with over six million problems that ranged from sorting out credit card debt to negotiating with landlords), we also advise people on their rights, and in particular discrimination or harassment against them because of their race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability, gender or even age.

So what exactly is discrimination? Sadly, it can manifest itself in many ways, but for a general definition, it is when an individual or a group of people are treated negatively and unfairly compared to other people because of who they are. A lot of discrimination takes place in the workplace: common problems include women who are sacked for being pregnant, disabled and older people being passed over for promotion, Black people being singled out for redundancy.

Many companies and services also discriminate against their customers: for example rental agencies telling Asian customers that a property has already been rented out but then showing it to a white customer. A bureau recently helped a client who had been refused dental treatment because he was HIV positive – the bureau negotiated with the dental practice to make sure the client got the service he was entitled to.

And although services have a legal duty to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ so that disabled people can use their services too, many flaunt the law and do not do this. For example, a bureau ran a successful local media campaign to make a carpark accessible to disabled drivers after the shopping centre and carpark company responsible refused to make a simple change to the entrance.

Another type of discrimination is indirect discrimination which is when someone sets conditions or requirements for a person to get or keep their job, which may seem to apply to everyone, but in fact may place people from a particular group at an unfair disadvantage. An example would be if an employer insists that candidates for a job should speak faultless English when this is clearly not needed for the type of work, or banning the wearing of headscarves or turbans at work.

As a charity, Citizens Advice believes in helping people protect their right to be treated fairly. We think it is important that anyone can come and talk to us about these issues - whether it's just want to find out more or take a case all the way to a Tribunal. Over 25,000 people sought help from bureaux with discrimination problems in the past year. With the impact of the recession, we have seen a 17% rise in employment discrimination enquiries.

To respond to the growing problem we are working to increase the number of specialist discrimination advisors in our bureaux. In 2008/09, for example, the Citizens Advice service received funding from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) which allowed us to widen our net to reach different communities and provide twelve bureaux around the UK with a specialist advisor, who can help people with more complex discrimination claims.

Many bureaux (120 at the last count) are also part of multi-agency race hate crime initiatives and many are centres where people who've experienced hate incidents or crimes can get help or report the matter confidentially. We help asylum seekers, gay men and lesbians and others who are being verbally or physically harassed by neighbours. A bureau managed to close down an on-line harassment campaign against an older man who had mental health problems, and got the police to take the matter seriously.

Our message is, if you are being harassed or treated unfairly you don't have to put up with it.

Sources of help:

[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk) has lots of useful information and factsheets about what to do if you are being discriminated against, and you can also find your nearest bureau.

Or check out [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

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www.thediversitygroup.co.uk

