

VOLUNTEER AND INTERN POLICY AT HACKNEY COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE

Introduction

Volunteers and Interns at Hackney Community Law Centre (HCLC) can make an appropriate and significant contribution to the work and objectives of HCLC and to the benefit of the local community. They can also obtain valuable litigation and administrative experience which will enhance their career prospects.

Placements often begin with simple administrative tasks and progress to more complex work. The minimum length of the placement is 3 months and volunteers must make a regular commitment to at least a day a week/interns 4 days a week.

Due to financial constraints volunteer expenses cannot currently be met. Funding has been obtained to pay interns £25 a day. The work of Volunteers and Interns is covered by HCLC's employer's public liability, professional indemnity and personal accident insurance. Volunteers and Interns with OISC accreditation giving immigration advice can also be insured through HCLC's professional indemnity insurance.

1. Definition of volunteer and Intern

Volunteers and interns put their experience, knowledge and skills at the disposal of HCLC free of charge. They may be unemployed, employed part-time elsewhere, students or work experience placements. They may volunteer with other organisations.

2. Selection Procedure

- 2.1 2 members of staff are designated as responsible for the role of volunteer co-ordinator. They read all curriculum vitae forwarded to HCLC by those seeking a volunteer placement.
- 2.2 All placements are for a minimum of 3 months.
- 2.3 Selection procedure is by interview. Up to 6 volunteers and 3 interns are selected for interview every 3 months. 1 of the HCLC volunteer programme co-ordinators asks a pro forma set of 6 questions. There is then a discussion about mutual expectations and the most appropriate option for any individual. Following the meeting the HCLC staff will decide which volunteers are suitable for acceptance and they will contact the candidates within 5 working days.
- 2.4 HCLC staff may follow up volunteer references if they consider it necessary.
- 2.5 Successful volunteers and Interns sign a Volunteer contract on acceptance of the role. This confirms acceptance of the terms and conditions which have been explained at interview.

- 2.6 If the volunteer/intern is participating in the case-worker shadowing scheme they are allocated to a particular staff member who will manage and supervise their placement. If they are accepted on to the administration scheme they will be managed and supervised by HCLC's administrator, currently Bella Donnelly. If they are accepted on to the generalist telephone advice line and drop in service they are supervised by Diane Morrison.

If they are accepted on to the Court Runner Scheme, or the evening Welfare Advice scheme they will be supervised by Wendy Pettifer.

3.0 Induction

- 3.1 The volunteer will be given appropriate training materials with which they should familiarise themselves as soon as possible. They should also familiarise themselves with basic forms on the Legal Services Commission website (unless they are administrative volunteers)
- 3.2 On the first day they will receive a brief induction by their supervisor into the administrative processes of HCLC and they will be introduced to the staff. Within their first week volunteers/interns will receive a half day induction into Housing Law. If appropriate they may also receive further induction in to benefits law.
- 3.2 The volunteers are based in the volunteer room. They have access to IT and other equipment necessary for efficient performance, and can use the kitchen and garden.

4.0 The Placement

The volunteer/intern receives supervision from their designated supervisor in respect of tasks during a placement which may include:

- Helping with administrative tasks (eg acting as receptionist, copying bundles, dealing with simple queries)
- Answering the generalist advice line
- Assessing clients eligibility for Legal Help
- Sitting in on client interviews
- Drafting letters, statements etc.
- Copying court bundles
- Interviewing clients at a drop in sessions to assess their suitability for acceptance as clients by caseworkers/solicitors and give one off advice where appropriate
- Researching particular legal aspects of cases
- Advising clients under the supervision of experienced solicitors
- Being a runner on the County Court Duty Solicitor Scheme

5.0 Termination and Evaluation of the Placement

- 5.1 The placement may be terminated at one week's notice if behaviour equivalent to gross misconduct has occurred, or if the volunteer/intern has failed to attend on 2 consecutive weeks without any valid reason and/or notice. The volunteer/intern is entitled to an explanation of the reasons for termination of the placement. The volunteer/intern may also give one week's notice of termination of the placement.
- 5.2 The volunteer/intern is encouraged to keep a weekly reflective journal on their experience which will be checked by their Supervisor when they leave. Volunteers/interns are evaluated informally on a daily basis by their supervisor and are encouraged to complete their Journal every week, reflecting on how their work enhances their development as lawyers, and helps the client. At the end of the placement they will discuss their experience with their supervisor.
- 5.3 The placement may be extended beyond 3 months by mutual agreement of the volunteer/intern and HCLC. If the volunteer has missed more than 2 consecutive days, their placement can be extended by an equivalent length of time by the supervisor, in consultation with the volunteer co-ordinator.
- 5.4 Volunteers/interns cannot access HCLC's grievance procedure, but are entitled to use the complaints procedure. Any complaints about a supervisor should initially be dealt with by the Volunteer Co-ordinator, and subsequently by the Management Committee.

6.0 Client Care

- 6.1 Volunteers must be aware that many clients are extremely vulnerable with a range of mental and physical health needs. They should be aware of the relevant ethical rules of conduct of client capacity, confidentiality and sensitivity. If they experience conflict/difficulty with a client during interview, they should terminate the interview politely but quickly and seek advice from their solicitor.
- 6.2 Clients present to HLC with a problem within one or more of the following categories:
- Housing
 - Homelessness
 - Immigration and asylum
 - Debt
 - Welfare benefits including Appeals against negative Welfare Benefit decisions

Volunteers/interns should understand that these are HCLC's principal areas of work, and that clients will sometimes be unable to present their problem in a coherent

manner. If a client presents with a problem outside these areas they will need to be sign-posted to another advice or similar agency.

6.3 The skills required include being able to obtain information from a vulnerable client in a sympathetic and understanding manner. Such information will relate to a client's eligibility for Legal Aid, interviewing and taking instructions, legal research, note-taking and observation at Tribunals and Court, drafting of written advice and statements.

6.4 Volunteers/interns should be aware that all advice given at HCLC is confidential, independent and impartial. Volunteers/interns should never give their personal details to a client. Be careful if a client asks for a text message of the details of their appointment.

6.4 During the placement, volunteers/interns are expected to gain an overview of the relevant law, carry out admin tasks, meet clients at HCLC, draft letters of advice and progress the cases always under supervision. Interpreters are provided if necessary. The level of complexity will range from dealing with clients on reception to advising a client in interview.

7 Equal Opportunities

In accordance with HCLC's Equal Opportunity Policy, volunteer/intern placements are open to individuals irrespective of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age or marital status. If in interview a prospective volunteer/intern demonstrates hostility to, or a clear lack of support for equal opportunities as defined above, they will be deemed unsuitable for a volunteer placement at HCLC.

8 Volunteer/Intern Co-ordinators

The current volunteer/intern co-ordinator is Diane Morrison. It is her responsibility to review and update HCLC's volunteer/intern policy and to implement any agreed changes. At present, she combines this role with heavy case-loads and is not always easily available to deal with non-urgent queries.

Conclusion

Most volunteers enjoy their work at HCLC enormously and are appreciated by both staff and clients. We hope a placement with HCLC encourages volunteers/interns to offer legal assistance to support those rendered vulnerable in today's society and helps in their search for employment.