

Dear Applicant

Housing and Welfare Benefits Caseworker

Thank you for your interest in this post to work in our Merton office.

I am pleased to enclose:

- Job Description and Person Specification
- Guidelines for Applicants
- Organisation Summary

You can download the application form from our website.

This post has been funded by Merton Council.

The closing date for receipt of applications is 5pm on 28 February 2023. Applications should be sent by email to recruitment@swllc.org.

Yours faithfully

Patrick Marples CEO
South West London Law Centres

JOB DESCRIPTION

POST:	Housing and Welfare Benefits Caseworker
Salary:	£22.500 per annum
Reports to:	Housing Team Leader
Line Manages:	Volunteers assigned to the project
Functional Links:	Board of Trustees, CEO, Senior Management Team, Team Leaders, Branch Administrators
Term:	Permanent (subject to funding, which is currently in place for three years)
Hours:	Full Time
Based at:	SWLLC's Merton office with weekly outreach to community locations across Merton

Purpose of job:

To support the community within Merton with advice and casework in relation to housing and welfare benefits

The beneficiaries of the service will be those living within the London borough of Merton, focusing on supporting clients to stay in their own homes through a mix of legal advice, support, welfare benefits, housing and debt work.

Key Tasks:

1. Monitoring a weekly housing advice line, offering one off advice to Merton residents and VCOS in Merton on a range of housing issues, particularly focused on those who are not eligible for legal aid and those in the private rental sector.
2. Undertaking housing casework to support those facing eviction within Merton, including early advice on Notices, defences to eviction and advice on disrepair issues
3. Undertaking outreach at community spaces such as Commonsides New Horizon Centre and Wimbledon Guild.

4. Referring those who need more specialist housing advice who are eligible for legal aid to our legal aid caseworkers.
5. Supporting those who are eligible for legal aid with collating the documents to evidence their eligibility
6. Referring those in need of income maximisation to our crisis team
7. Booking those who need help with return of rental deposits into our pro bono clinic; undertaking casework for those who require it.
8. Making direct referrals for those who need representation at tribunal for benefits appeals to our pro bono project with Simmons & Simmons.
9. Supporting our welfare benefits caseworker with casework in relation to those who need tribunal representation for welfare benefits issues under legal aid.
10. Train a small team of volunteers on elements of the role and supervise their work.
11. To keep up-to-date at all time with changes in housing and welfare benefits law by reading, attending training events and using computer for reference purposes.

Duties & Responsibilities

- 1 To ensure that all advice, assistance and representation complies with the requirements of our Lexcel quality mark and accreditation.
- 2 To regularly participate in team and staff meetings
- 3 To carry out file reviews in accordance with Lexcel requirements.
- 4 To provide training and talks to Law Centre staff, volunteers and to front line advice agency staff within the Law Centre's catchment area at least once per month.
- 5 To be responsible for your own word processing, filing and case recording using Clio.
- 6 To help develop relationships and work arrangements with local partners to develop referrals
- 7 To attend meetings of coordinating bodies as required.
- 8 To provide cover for colleagues during absences.
- 9 Work with the Money Team Manager to provide case studies and client voices.

Project Record Keeping and Reporting

- 1 Maintain relevant client databases and produce returns to Money Team Manager (Cost of Living Co-ordinator) so we can provide grant monitoring reports to funders.
- 2 Search for and collect missing data to enable complete monitoring returns
- 3 Work with the Money Team Manager (Cost of Living Co-ordinator) to provide case studies and client voices.

- 4 Assist with the development and maintenance of a database of standard documents and paragraphs to aid in the efficiency of delivery of welfare rights advice

Training and professional development

- 5 To attend courses on new legislation, specialist skills and the use of information technology.
- 6 Keep abreast of changes in legislation, practice and caselaw.
- 7 To discuss regularly with the Manager your job performance and personal career development.
- 8 To be appraised regularly and to engage fully in this process to further personal development and maximise your contribution to SWLLC.
- 9 Attend relevant training courses and appropriate internal and external meetings, to enhance skills as a crisis navigator.
- 10 Consult relevant colleagues to ensure that working practice is consistently of a high quality.
- 11 Provide feedback to trainers, team members and Manager on the effectiveness of informal and formal learning activities
- 12 Take part in regular supervision meetings with Manager and other caseworkers and obtain informal support as necessary.
- 13 To be appraised regularly and to engage fully in this process to further personal development and maximise your contribution to SWLLC.

Supervision and Support

- 14 Participate in supervision of volunteers and file/peer review of colleagues and volunteers
- 15 Assist with the Volunteer and Pro Bono Coordinator in maintaining a cadre of volunteers to assist with all aspects of crisis navigation advice including the administration of this project.
- 16 Train and oversee volunteers work so that they gain skills in appropriate case management and file maintenance practises including the use of our case management system.
- 17 Train volunteers in law, practices and procedures to deliver the service and make use of external help and resources in delivering this.

Social Policy and Service Development

- 18 To be alert at all times to the social policy implications of issues presented by clients.
- 19 To take appropriate action to influence social policy in regard to these issues.

Equal Opportunities

20 To have regard at all times in the planning and execution of duties to SWLLC's Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

Other Duties

21 Play a full role in the organisation supporting colleagues to maximise their effectiveness.

22 Travel to meetings and other events across SW London as required.

23 In addition to the tasks and duties listed in this job description to undertake such duties as may be identified and which are generally compatible with the functions of the post.

Working Hours

24 This post may require some evening working providing advice at events or occasional evening advice sessions for workers. You may also work with our partner organisations providing outreach in their offices. You may also be required to work the occasional weekend for one off events

Location

You will be based in our Merton office but will be expected to undertake some of your initial training at our Croydon office. You will also be required to attend regular outreach sessions across the borough of Merton. The locations of our offices are on our website

PERSON SPECIFICATION

POST:	Housing and Welfare Benefits Caseworker
Salary:	£22,500 per annum
Reports to:	Housing Team Leader
Line Manages:	Volunteers assigned to the project
Functional Links:	Board of Trustees, CEO, Senior Management Team, Team Leaders, Branch Administrators
Term:	Three years initially from April 2023
Hours:	Full Time
Based at:	SWLLC's Merton office with weekly outreach to community locations across Merton

Knowledge

1. Legal Practice Course or relevant experience in legal/advice environment
2. Familiarity with welfare systems including benefits, debt, health and social care services.
3. Commitment to Social Welfare Law
4. Experience of housing law
5. Ability to prioritise work, manage cases and maintain files efficiently
6. Desirable - Experience of working under the legal aid scheme (Legal Help and certificated) and the exercise of delegated functions or an understanding of what Legal Aid is

Interpersonal & Communication

7. Self-motivated
8. Ability to prioritise work, manage cases and maintain files efficiently

9. An understanding of and commitment to equal opportunities issues and its relevance to legal advice
10. Ability to communicate effectively with the organisation's client group
11. Excellent and clear written communication skills
12. Ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines
13. Ability to work as part of a team

Other

14. Excellent IT skills
15. Ability to work to project targets and project objectives
16. A positive, proactive and flexible approach to working with colleagues, clients and partners
17. Ability to work in SWLLC other offices

SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES

Legal Action for Local Communities

ORGANISATION SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES OF THE POST

We are looking to recruit a highly-motivated and proactive individual looking to support residents of Merton to stabilise their immediate crisis in order to get better outcomes from our specialist services.

You will be part of a new team to develop our services within Merton and your role will be key to increasing access to our services. This larger more ambitious project has come through some successful pilot projects. We will continue to promote the effectiveness of this way of working as well as highlight the data and our client voices.

The project aims to give practical help and support to people seen by our housing and debt teams. Both teams see many people in crisis situations, but current funding limits the amount of support we can give them. The housing and benefits case worker will provide part of our triage for housing and welfare benefits in Merton, They will provide early legal advice, including some telephone advice as well as some casework under supervision as well as referring cases internally to our various specialist teams and projects. Many people will come through either our money advice team or through the housing court duty scheme but as we increase our visibility in Merton we expect to see more referrals from partner organisations within the borough, and this extra support and intervention will help people stay safe in their homes. You will be supported by volunteers.

As the role progresses we will support you to develop your skills and to progress your legal career, subject to funding.

SWLLC is a community based legal practice and a registered charity. Our history dates back to 1974 when the first Law Centres in Wandsworth were created. We became SWLLC in 2004 through the merger of a number of Law Centres in South West London. The law centre won the highly prestigious Legal Aid Firm/Not for Profit of the year 2020 at the LALY Awards.

SWLLC now works across six South West London boroughs (Croydon, Merton, Kingston, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth) helping people to understand and enforce their legal rights. In doing so, we address the root causes of social injustice – poverty, family breakdown, unemployment and exploitation. SWLLC provides full legal casework, representation and advice in the following areas of social welfare law – Community Care, **Debt**, Employment, **Housing**, Immigration & Asylum and in a limited way in Welfare Rights. We represent clients in all courts and tribunals. We also provide the housing duty solicitor schemes at Croydon, Kingston and Wandsworth County Courts giving emergency representation in possession hearings for rent and owned homes and at the warrant stage for evictions.

SWLLC delivers one of the largest pro bono clinic programs in the country, to provide initial advice on legal problems. There are 16 firms involved with the clinics as well as individual solicitors. SWLLC works with and assists over 6,500 people per year.

SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES

Legal Action for Local Communities

GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

Please read these notes carefully before filling in your application form, as the decision to shortlist for interview will be based solely on the information provided on the application form.

General Guidelines

1. Give only information, which is relevant to the post.
2. Complete all sections of the form. You will need to do this in order to be fairly compared to other candidates. All information given is treated as confidential.
3. Complete a rough draft first. This avoids mistakes and untidiness and enables you to organise and review the information you put on the form.
4. Get feedback from other people and make sure you give examples, which demonstrate your ability to do the job.
5. Complete the form in type, word processor, black ballpoint or ink.

Selection Criteria – The Person Specification

The skills, experience and qualification described in the Person Specification are the criteria against which you will be assessed and short-listed. Make sure you have covered each section of the Person Specification in your application form.

Employment

When completing this section include relevant part-time work or work taken on a voluntary basis. Outlining your previous work experiences or other responsibilities may help you to uncover relevant skills, which are clear signs of your ability to do the job.

Further Information

In section four of the application form you should try to show how you are able to do the job. Rather than simply repeating your career history, look at the skills and experience required for the job and provide evidence that you possess them. Concentrate on the things you know and what you can do rather than on what other people in your group or workplace can do.

References

Where possible at least one of your referees should be a previous employer; either you're present or most recent employer. If you have not previously been employed, or have not worked for some time, give the name of someone who knows you sufficiently well to confirm the information given and who can comment on your ability to do the job. (You must not provide a relative or partner's name as a referee).

Monitoring Information

This section is included in order to monitor the effectiveness of SWLLC's Equal Opportunities Policy, which aims to ensure that all applicants are treated fairly. All information is treated in confidence and used only for statistical monitoring.

The monitoring section of the application form is not used as part of the selection process. Consequently, if for example you have a disability, and this is an item in the person specification, **do also mention it in the main part of your application form.**

Finally – take a copy of the form and keep it to remind yourself of what you have said if you are called for an interview. Good Luck!