

Legal Advice Centre (University House)

Equality Rights Project

Our new Equality Rights Project consists of three strands:

1. Disability Welfare Appeals Advocacy
2. Employment Discrimination Casework
3. Domestic Violence Casework

We are looking to recruit for a new post, for someone who has specialist experience in conducting the employment discrimination casework under strand 2 of the Project.

Strand 1 - Disability Welfare Appeals Advocacy

Part of the Project will expand the capacity and scope of our existing Advocacy Project. We will continue to develop our collaborations and partnership working, and in doing so, we wish to become a volunteer/pro bono hub in order to provide assistance to people who have disability benefit appeals.

We established our Advocacy Project some four years ago. As a result of the Government's welfare reforms, we were inundated with clients seeking help with appeals against the stoppage of Employment & Support Allowance, Universal Credit, Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payments. The Legal Advice Centre is supporting appointed 'advocates' to undertake disability appeal casework and to provide advocacy at appeals, which are heard at the First-tier tribunal.

In the East End of London, our project has proven to be very successful and has now attracted a large number of pro bono partners. We need to take advantage of large numbers of volunteers that we now have access to in order to provide access to justice for as many people in the South-East of England as possible.

Key outcomes are to address disability discrimination by providing individual support and representation. We are also seeking to fight disability discrimination by training a large number of volunteer 'advocates'.

Strands 2 and 3 - Employment Discrimination/Domestic Violence Casework

In recent years, there has been the development by GPs and other clinical staff of what is commonly now known as Social Prescribing, whereby patients can be referred to non-clinical sources of support within the community. Whilst this work is of real benefit there is now a growing need to provide community-based medical practitioners with more potent tools to help combat systemic discrimination of the unwell within our society. This is why we now are advocating 'Legal Prescribing' and why we are seeking to develop our GP-based pilot project, which we hope can be replicated across the country.

Eighteen months ago, we established a legal clinic providing free specialist employment law advice in a health setting. This is a partnership between lawyers and doctors, involving 7 GP practices in the East End of London and Macmillan.

Through feedback from our clients we know that in many instances the first professional they discussed their legal problem with, was their GP. Our project allows medical staff to prescribe legal interventions, as part of a equality rights-based approach to protect and promote the interests of patients with complex health and social needs. For example, as part of this project, a GP who has a patient who has developed a chronic stress condition because of poor working conditions, and who has written various medical prescriptions for the patient, can now write out what is, in effect, a Legal Prescription by seeking the support of a legal specialist to intervene in the employment issue. Amongst other things, our Project engages with medical practitioners to educate them on what is possible through legal interventions, and also provide them with the means to carry this work through.

Our experience is showing that patients who normally would not seek advice from a solicitor's practice directly, are accepting referrals from a medical professional. There is a need for integrated services in the UK. The Marmot Review and the Low Commission both concluded early access to legal advice is key to improving health and social outcomes.

In addition to employment law interventions, as part of our expansion of this project, we will also include casework on Domestic Violence at GP surgeries and ante-natal clinics. 60% of DV first occurs during pregnancy.