

## LEGAL SERVICES

### **Children's Legal Centre**

This service gives advice and information on law and policy affecting children and young people in England and Wales. The website provides answers to frequently asked questions on the following topics:- child employment, child protection, child witnesses, contact, educational maintenance allowance, home alone, parental responsibility, refugee and asylum-seeking children, residence, school attendance and useful contacts.

University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester CO4 3SQ  
01206 872 466 – office line, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

Fax: 01206 874026

Email: [clc@essex.ac.uk](mailto:clc@essex.ac.uk)

Website: [www.childrenslegalcentre.com](http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com)

The Centre's **Education Law Advocacy Unit (ELAU)** provides free initial advice to children and/or their parents with concerns relating to schools and Local Education Authorities. If you have a complex education law problem and need further advice and representation, the ELAU receives funding from the Legal Services Commission to help people on low incomes. The ELAU will advise if you are eligible.

0845 456 6811 – ELAU Helpline, Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5pm.

If you contact the ELAU by email at [nel@essex.ac.uk](mailto:nel@essex.ac.uk) and give them your phone number, they will try to call you back within 24 hours.

### **Commissioner for Oaths/Notaries Public**

A Commissioner for Oaths can authenticate UK legal documents. If your legal document is needed for a legal matter in another country, you will need to have it authenticated by a Notary Public. All practising solicitors count as Commissioner for Oaths. You can get a list of local solicitors from the Advice Centre (01279 446622). To make an appointment to see a Notary Public locally, contact:

Whiskers Solicitors and Notaries, 6 Mitre Buildings, Kitson Way, Harlow CM20 1DR  
(01279) 439439 Fax: (01279) 439100

### **Community Legal Service Partnership (CLSP), Harlow**

Harlow CLSP brings together those who fund legal and advice services (such as the Legal Services Commission, Harlow Council, local and national charities) with those who supply the services (such as solicitors and advice centres). There are also representatives of community groups in the CLSP. The CLSP works to ensure that the right kinds of services are available to meet priority needs, and that clients are referred to the right agency for help. Recent projects include an electronic referral guide. The Legal Services Commission is re-organising Community Legal Services which may lead to changes in the role of the CLSP. For more information, contact:-

The Manager, Harlow Welfare Rights & Advice, 2 East Gate, Harlow CM20 1ND  
(01279) 446622 Fax: (01279) 446599

### **Legal Information and Advice**

The Legal Services Commission is responsible for the Community Legal Service (civil law) and Criminal Defence Service (criminal law) legal aid schemes in England and Wales.

Community Legal Advice (formerly known as the Community Legal Service) helps people who are eligible for legal aid to protect their rights. Community Legal Advice funds a

network of Quality Marked solicitors and other advice providers to help people who need advice in the following categories of law: actions against the police, clinical negligence, community care, community mediation, consumer and general contract, crime, debt, education, employment, family, family mediation, housing, immigration, mental health, personal injury, public law and welfare benefits. Help varies from information leaflets and directing people to other services, to specialist advice and taking cases to court where necessary.

The Criminal Defence Service (CDS) funds Quality Marked solicitors to provide legal advice and representation to people who qualify financially and are under investigation or facing criminal charges. In some circumstances, the police can delay but not stop you seeing a solicitor. Ask the police to contact the duty solicitor (available 24 hours a day).

Alternatively you can choose a solicitor contracted by the CDS from the list kept by the police.

If you have to go to the magistrates' court on a criminal case and do not have your own solicitor, there will usually be a duty solicitor (either at the court or on call) to give you free advice and representation if the case is judged to be serious. Other assistance is means tested. The following people qualify automatically for criminal legal aid – those who receive Income Support, income-based Job Seeker's Allowance or a guaranteed State Pension Credit; those who are under the age of 16; those who are under 18 and in full-time education.

If your case proceeds to the Crown Court, your solicitor will advise you if you have to pay a contribution towards your legal costs.

The Legal Services Commission produces useful leaflets, including "A Practical Guide to Community Legal Service Funding", "A Practical Guide to Criminal Defence Services" and "Criminal Defence Services at the Police Station and in the Court". You can download them from the LSC website at [www.legalservices.gov.uk](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk) or ask your solicitor or the Advice Centre (01279 446622) to print a copy for you. You can use the Internet facilities in the Advice Centre User Room to access relevant websites.

Community Legal Advice (CLA) has its own website at [www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk) where you can:

- Find a high quality legal adviser or solicitor in your area for civil or criminal cases.
- See if you qualify for legal aid using the Eligibility Calculator
- Ask a question or choose a topic and link to the right place on the best advice sites in the UK
- Read and print legal information leaflets.

Information is available in English, Welsh, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Turkish and Urdu.

You can also use the CLA National Helpline on 0845 345 4 345 to find high quality local legal help and order free information leaflets.

If you do not want to use the online Eligibility Calculator to see if you are entitled to legal aid, you can ask your solicitor or adviser. Public funding can only be given for help from legal advisers who have been awarded the CLA or CDS Specialist Quality Mark (they will display the appropriate logo) AND if your type of case is covered by the legal aid scheme. They will ask about your finances and will tell you at once if you qualify for legal aid. If you are receiving income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance or guarantee state pension credit, you will be eligible on income and capital (savings). If you are not receiving one of these benefits, you must be able to show that your capital AND your income are within

the current financial limits. For some levels of service, the solicitor or advisor will need to apply to a regional office of the LSC for a funding decision. Your solicitor will advise you if you need to pay a contribution towards your legal costs.

Not all solicitors provide advice in all subjects; nor do they all offer LSC funded services. You can find information about those that do from the CLA on [www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk) or their Helpline on 0845 345 4 345.

You can also find information in the “Law Society Directory of Solicitors and Barristers” at [www.lawsociety.org.uk](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk) or ring 0870 606 6565.

Some solicitors will provide an initial consultation for a pre-agreed fixed fee. You can search for law firms which offer fixed fee interviews on the Law Society website at [www.lawsociety.org.uk](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk).

Many cases are carried out under a conditional fee agreement, commonly known as “no win, no fee”. Your solicitor will only be paid if you win your case. These fees are usually paid in whole or part by the losing party. Your solicitor will normally be able to arrange insurance to cover the risk of you losing the case and having to pay the other side’s costs. You may have to pay the insurance premium. Claims for accidents and personal injuries are usually carried out on this basis. See the section on Accidents.

You can get a list of local solicitors, whom you can contact to ask about their specialisms and charges, from the Advice Centre (01279 446622).

You may have legal expenses insurance through your car insurance or motor insurance policies. You may also get free legal advice if you belong to a Trades Union or other society e.g. some sports and social clubs.

### **Mediation**

Mediation can be used for many types of disputes such as family disputes over either money or children, disputes between neighbours, commercial and civil disputes, disputes about special educational needs and clinical negligence cases. A neutral and independent third party helps people in dispute to reach a voluntary resolution agreed by both sides. The mediator does not make decisions or impose a settlement. Any agreement reached through mediation is usually written down and signed by both parties and the mediator(s). However, it is not legally binding and cannot be enforced in court unless the parties decide to make it a legal contract. The agreement does not affect anyone's legal rights, allowing each party the freedom to find another way of dealing with the dispute at any time.

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You can get help with the cost of family mediation if you are eligible for legal aid from Community Legal Advice (CLA). You can find publicly-funded family mediation services on the CLA website at [www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk) or by calling their Helpline on 0845 345 4 345.

### **Mediation Service (Herts and Essex)**

Family Mediation is an independent service offering help through trained mediators to people who are separated, divorced or separating, to reach practical agreements regarding children and family finances that enable them to separate at the lowest emotional and financial cost. Public funding is available for those assessed as eligible.

Homeless Prevention/Intergenerational Mediation is a free independent service offering help through trained mediators for young people and parents or carers who need to discuss housing and shared living arrangements.

Counselling Service is a service for children experiencing family change. Children and Parent Work Groups are run on a regular basis.

Community Mediation/Neighbourhood Dispute Resolution is a free independent service to residents in Harlow offering help through trained mediators where there is a communication breakdown between neighbours over issues such as noise, children, pets, boundaries, car parking and harassment.

The service is open Monday to Thursday, 9am to 5pm and Friday, 9am to 4pm. It closes from 1pm to 2pm daily. You can make your own appointment or be referred by a professional agency.

Helen Elliott, Sewell House, 349 The Hides, Harlow CM20 3QY  
(01279) 426749 - telephone and fax  
Email: [hefms@ntlworld.com](mailto:hefms@ntlworld.com)

### **Rights of Women**

This is a women's voluntary organisation which offers free confidential legal advice to women on the telephone advice line and through information sheets downloadable from the website. They don't provide a counselling service but may be able to direct you to services that can help.

Through the Legal Advice Line, qualified women solicitors or barristers offer specialist advice in family law, divorce and relationship breakdown, children and contact issues, domestic violence, sexual violence, discrimination and lesbian parenting. This line is open Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 2pm to 4pm and 7pm to 9pm. It is also open Friday 12 noon to 2pm.

020 7251 6577                      Textphone: 020 7490 2562

Through the Sexual Violence Legal Advice Line, qualified women solicitors or barristers offer specialist advice on rape, sexual assault, child sex offences, family related sex offences, trafficking and general criminal legal advice. This line is open Monday 11am to 1pm and Tuesday 10am to 12pm.

020 7251 8887                      Textphone: 020 7490 2562

Website: [www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk)

**Solicitors** – see the information under the Legal Information and Advice heading earlier in this section.