

April 2024

Dear Applicant

Part Time Welfare Benefits Caseworker

Thank you for your interest in this post.

I am pleased to enclose:

- Organisation Summary and context of the post
- Job Description and Person Specification for the role of Part Time Welfare Benefits Caseworker

Please apply to recruitment@swllc.org by forwarding your CV together with a covering letter of no more than two pages of A4 setting out how you meet the person specification and why you would like to work with South West London Law Centres.

Please note that applications without a covering letter will not be considered.

The final closing date for applications to this role is 5pm on 20 May 2024, however, we will be evaluating applications as we receive them and so you are advised to submit your application as soon as possible.

If you would like to have a brief informal chat to discuss the role, please contact us at recruitment@swllc.org

Yours faithfully

Patrick Marples CEO
South West London Law Centres

SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES
Legal Action for Local Communities

JOB ADVERT – Part Time Welfare Benefits Caseworker

South West London Law Centres (SWLLC) is one of the largest Law Centres in the country and we are seeking an experienced welfare benefits caseworker to join our cost of living to support community members with welfare benefits casework and appeals.

We are looking for someone who can work 21 hours per week. Our cost of living is highly respected and very busy, receiving referrals from other teams within the law centre as well as from community partners. The Law Centre is well known and highly regarded, winning the Legal Aid Firm/Not for Profit in the 2020 LALY Awards.

You will work with colleagues to resolve welfare benefits issues through casework, including undertaking appeals across all benefits and providing representation where necessary. You will show care and attention to our clients and the command of detail which is a hallmark of our work. This is an exciting opportunity for someone who wants to take the next step in their legal career and to make a real difference within the community.

We can offer flexible working and generous benefits.

POST:	Part Time Welfare Benefits Caseworker
Salary:	up to £32,000 pro rata (£19,200 actual), depending upon experience
Reports to:	Cost of Living Project Manager
Line Manages:	Volunteers assigned to the project
Term:	Initial fixed term contract for one year, with the intent to secure onwards funding to make the role permanent
Based at:	Hybrid working, with a permanent base at one of our offices.
Hours:	Part time – 21 hours per week.

The final closing date for applications to this role is 5pm on 20 May 2024, however, we will be evaluating applications as we receive them and so you are advised to submit your application as soon as possible. If you would like to have a brief informal chat to discuss the role, please contact us at recruitment@swllc.org. Please see above for how to apply.

SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES

Legal Action for Local Communities

ORGANISATION SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES OF THE POST

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

We now work across six South West London boroughs (Croydon, Merton, Kingston, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth). 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 **Welfare Rights**. In 2022/23 we assisted 6778 people. We represent clients in all courts and tribunals and worked on 2,609 cases in 2022/23.

We continue to run one of the largest pro bono clinic services across England, we deliver around 100 free clinics appointments per week offering initial advice on a wide range of civil / legal problems over 400 pro-bono lawyers helped 2,954 clients last year.

We have a strong emphasis on quality – we are accredited to the Law Society’s Lexcel standard for excellence in legal practice management and client care and our Immigration Team has been rated as “Excellent” in a Legal Aid Peer Review for three years running.

Working at South West London Law Centres

South West London Law Centres has served the communities of South West London for 50 years. Today, we continue to meet the needs and address the disadvantage of around 7,000 clients per year. They include women fleeing domestic violence, people who are in housing crisis, people with no income or recourse to public funds, those with complex benefit challenges, and people mistreated by unscrupulous employers.

Joining the law centre is a chance to be a part of the law centres movement and to make a real impact with every case.

As an employer we offer hybrid working and support a range flexible working arrangements, including compressed hours to a four day week or nine day fortnight. We welcome applications from those wishing to work part time.

We have a generous leave allowance at 29 days per calendar year, rising to 34 days after five years’ continuous service as well as a range of discretionary leave to cover emergencies.

We offer opportunities for training and progression and support staff wellbeing through an employee assistance programme.

Our offices are centrally located close to transport hubs.

The context of the post

Our cost of living team is grant funded and carries out crisis navigation and welfare benefits casework for community members struggling with the cost of living. Crisis navigation involves a full triage of the matter, income maximisation and wraparound care so that our clients receive an holistic service and are better able to put our advice into practice.

Our team is comprised of two crisis navigators and two welfare benefits paralegals, overseen by our cost of living project manager. Our busy debt team complements our cost of living work and provides a steady stream of referrals alongside referrals from community partners, outreach and drop-ins.

Our project has been running for two years and we have identified that the biggest area of unmet need is support with welfare benefits appeals. Most of our clients have an underlying benefits issue and this can often only be addressed with casework, often leading to an appeal. Adding greater expertise to our young team will help us to build capacity in a sustainable way and ultimately to help more people escape the cycle of poverty.

We are seeking an experienced caseworker who is highly motivated and wants to take the next step in their career so that we can continue to make a real difference within the community.

SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES
Legal Action for Local Communities

JOB DESCRIPTION

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Key Tasks

- 1 To provide a targeted welfare rights based casework and representation service to residents of South West London, preparing appeals across all benefits, and if necessary providing representation. The provision of the service will be face to face, via telephone, email, and web access.
- 2 To support the work of the cost of living team by participating in regular outreach and drop in events.
- 3 To participate in the training of welfare rights paralegals and volunteers assigned to the project.
- 4 To support welfare rights paralegals to take on more appeals and to supervise their work.

Duties & Responsibilities

- 5 To ensure that all advice, assistance and representation complies with the requirements of our Lexcel quality mark and accreditation.
- 6 To ensure all work is recorded using our case management system.
- 7 To participate in team meetings and to carry out file reviews in accordance with Lexcel requirements.
- 8 To participate staff meetings from time to time.
- 9 To be responsible for your own word processing, filing and case recording within the case management system.

- 10 To advise and provide training and talks to Law Centre staff, volunteers, front line advice agency staff and the public within the Law Centre's catchment area as necessary
- 11 To attend coordinating bodies as required.
- 12 To provide cover for colleagues during absences.

Advice & Casework

- 13 Provide casework face to face, via telephone, email, video and at outreach. To visit clients at their homes if appropriate.
- 14 Provide the full range of advice activities to assist clients with welfare rights advice. This is to include interviewing clients, advising them of their rights and responsibilities, assessing suitability and effectiveness of alternative courses of action, advising on legal procedures
- 15 To assist other teams in the Law Centre in helping clients resolve any benefits matters.
- 16 To assist clients in liaising with other people and organisations to resolve their benefits problems where possible.
- 17 To prepare and represent clients at Tribunals and Courts and do the necessary preparation and research as well as assisting clients who are self-representing.
- 18 Keep up to date, accurate and detailed case records.

Project Record Keeping and Reporting

- 19 Maintain relevant client databases and produce quarterly returns so we can provide grant monitoring reports to funders.
- 20 Work with the Communications Manager to provide case studies
- 21 Assist with the development and maintenance of a database of standard documents - wording to aid in the efficiency of delivery of welfare rights advice

Training and professional development

- 22 Attend relevant training courses and appropriate internal and external meetings, to enhance skills as a specialist welfare rights caseworker.
- 23 Consult relevant colleagues to ensure that working practice is consistently of a high quality.
- 24 Keep up to date with all relevant current legislation and policy and share knowledge with colleagues
- 25 Take part in regular supervision meetings with team leader and other caseworkers and obtain informal support as necessary.
- 26 To be appraised regularly and to engage fully in this process to further personal development and maximise your contribution to SWLLC.

Supervision and Support

- 27 Participate in the training and supervision of volunteers and file/peer review of colleagues.
- 28 Oversee and monitor volunteer advice sessions to provide welfare rights advice

- 29 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.
- 30 Train volunteers in welfare rights law, practices and procedures to deliver the service and make use of external help and resources in delivering this.

Social Policy and Service Development

- 31 To be alert at all times to the social policy implications of issues presented by clients.
- 32 To take appropriate action to influence social policy in regard to these issues.
- 33 Take part in service planning activities

Equal Opportunities

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

Other Duties

- 35 Play a full role in the organisation supporting colleagues to maximise their effectiveness.
- 36 Travel to meetings and other events across SW London as required.
- 37 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

- 38 This post may require some evening working providing advice at our pro bono clinics / evening advice sessions. 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. Time off in lieu will be provided.

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PERSON SPECIFICATION

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Essential Experience & Skills

1. At least 2 years recent casework experience in Welfare Rights Casework.
2. Experience of preparing welfare benefits appeals and representing clients at appeal.
3. Up to date knowledge of welfare rights law, experience of giving advice and representation on welfare rights matters and awareness of important policy issues.
4. Ability to write detailed up to date case notes, letters and reports as required in plain English.
5. Ability to deal with clients advice needs face to face, over the telephone, via email, video or outreach
6. Ability to manage a challenging caseload, and prioritise work in the face of competing demands on your time.
7. Ability to respond sensitively to clients from a variety of backgrounds who are under pressure and negotiate with third parties in order to minimise conflict.
8. Ability to research, understand and explain complex information both orally and in writing.
9. Practical knowledge of IT sufficient to use Microsoft Office applications including Word, Outlook and Excel to administer your own workload.

10. Commitment to taking part in social policy, research or evaluation activities as required, for example by responding to survey and identifying trends in your caseload
11. Commitment to undergo training and participate in other forms of professional development.
12. Commitment to equal opportunities as set out in the principles and policies of South West London Law Centres

Desirable Experience and Skills

1. Experience of taking cases to the upper tribunal.
2. Experience in working with volunteers to deliver a service.
3. Experience of mentoring and supervision
4. Experience of delivering talks and training