

## FLAC VOLUNTEER DECLARATION AND AGREEMENT FORM

**Name of volunteer:** (please use block capitals):

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- I have read the attached Volunteer Guidelines and agree to uphold and abide by them.
- I am in good standing with my professional body and capable of being fully licensed to practise.
- I declare that the information contained within this form to be accurate and true and I will inform FLAC of any change.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for offering your time and skills to FLAC to support promoting equal access to justice for all!**

Please return your completed form to: **Kuda Mushaya, Volunteer Development Officer, FLAC, 85/86 Dorset St, Dublin 1, D01 P9Y3.**

Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC) considers that protecting personal information, including sensitive personal information, is very important and we recognise that you have an interest in how we collect, use and share such information. We invite you to review this Data Protection Notice which outlines how we use and protect that information.

### Data Protection Notice

Personal data collected by FLAC is used for the following purposes: providing free legal advice services to the public; administration; health and safety and to provide you with updates in respect of the activities of FLAC. Personal data collected from volunteers may include your name, address, contact details and educational information. FLAC processes any personal data collected in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003. FLAC may keep your data for a reasonable period in connection with the purpose for which it is collected but will not keep it for any longer than is necessary and/or as required by law.

FLAC may disclose your data to agents, contractors or service providers engaged by FLAC in connection with the activities referred to above. Such third parties are only permitted to use your data as instructed by FLAC and are also required to keep your data safe and secure. We will not use your personal information for marketing purposes without your consent. FLAC will not disclose your personal data to callers to FLAC centres.

You have the right to request a copy of the information held by us about you. We may charge a fee for this which will not exceed €6.35. You also have the right to access your data, have changed any inaccuracies in the details we hold about you, the right to object to the use of your data and the right to block any specific uses of your data, by means of a request in writing to Free Legal Advice Centres, 85/86 Dorset Street, Dublin 1, D01 P9Y3 Ireland.



# FLAC Volunteer Guidelines

*February 2018*

## **FLAC Volunteer Guidelines**

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### **Purpose of these Guidelines**

These guidelines aim to provide volunteers with practical information to assist them in advising service users to FLAC clinics. They set out the nature, scope and limits of the service that a volunteer can provide in a FLAC clinic.

Each FLAC volunteer must commit to reading, signing and adhering to these guidelines, and any update of these guidelines. All previous guidelines are rescinded. The guidelines have been approved by FLAC Council (the board of FLAC) and they will be updated on a regular basis. The guidelines are circulated electronically on an annual basis to all volunteers on FLAC's database and to all Citizens Information Centres that run a FLAC service at the beginning of every calendar year. They are also available on FLAC's website.

FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres)

Tel: 01 887 3600

E-mail: [volunteers@flac.ie](mailto:volunteers@flac.ie)

Web: [www.flac.ie](http://www.flac.ie)

## FOREWORD

The provision of free legal information and advice services, through FLAC clinics, is a key element of FLAC's overall strategy in promoting equal access to justice, as it is a vital component in empowering and enabling people to access and assert their rights and entitlements. The clinics enhance and expand upon the services provided through our telephone information and referral line, and through the production of information leaflets and the FLAC website.

The data collected each week by volunteers at FLAC clinics is combined and analysed to develop a picture of unmet legal need across the country and to identify the areas of most concern that are being experienced by people who call to the FLAC clinics.

Our relationship with the Citizens Information Board and local Citizens Information Services around the country is of vital importance. The Citizens Information Board provides funding and support to FLAC to enable it to operate the clinics. FLAC works in partnership with Citizens Information Services to provide high quality and consistent legal advice clinics which meet the needs of the public. FLAC is very grateful for their support, and their commitment to organising, hosting and facilitating locally based legal advice clinics.

We hope that you find these guidelines useful and practical, and thank you for your commitment to FLAC and access to justice.

Eilis Barry, Chief Executive

Peter Ward, Chairperson

## WELCOME FROM ZSÉ VARGA

We are delighted to welcome you, as a new volunteer, a returning volunteer, or a long-standing volunteer continuing to give your time, energy and expertise in the pursuit of access to justice.

Volunteering has been at the heart of FLAC since it was first established in 1969, and valuing volunteers remains one of our core organisational values. We want to ensure that volunteering for FLAC is a safe and fulfilling experience. Through your volunteering you provide a bridge between the service user's own situation and the law as it applies to them.

Any suggestions from volunteers for developing and improving the service are greatly appreciated. Please feel free to contact us at any stage let us know how we can better support you in this regard.

Zsé Varga, Volunteer Development Manager

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# 1 About FLAC Clinics

## 1.1 What is a FLAC Clinic?

A FLAC clinic is a community-based legal information and advice service delivered by volunteer lawyers, who provide confidential, basic, first-stop free legal information, advice and referral. Most FLAC clinics operate for approximately 2 hours in the evening time on a weekly, fortnightly, or monthly basis.

## 1.2 What is its purpose?

The aim of a FLAC clinic is to provide basic legal information and advice to people to enable them to know and assert their rights.

FLAC collects standardised anonymous data on the types of queries that arise at FLAC clinics. This helps us build up a picture of the types of issues that people are facing and identify the nature and extent of unmet legal need.

## 1.3 Who is it aimed at?

FLAC clinics are open to all adults and there is no application procedure or means test. However the service is predominantly aimed at those who are unable to afford advice from a solicitor in private practice or who are waiting to avail of the state funded legal aid service.



The service provided is a once-off initial advice service. FLAC volunteers are not permitted to take on the case or provide second opinions for people who already have legal advice. There is generally no follow-up or ongoing relationship and FLAC volunteer advisors will not provide legal representation.

#### 1.4 Where are they based?

FLAC clinics are mainly run in partnership with the Citizens Information Services based around Ireland. The Citizens Information Services provide the facilities and reception cover and often manage the rostering of FLAC volunteers and the client appointments. A small number of clinics operate in local community centres.

#### 1.5 How do they work?

Some services operate on a drop in/ first-come, first-served basis. Many FLAC clinics use an appointment system, whereby people can make appointments for the clinic with the staff of the Citizens Information Centres (CIC) during the opening hours of the CICs.

An up to date list of the location and days/times of all the FLAC clinics is available on the FLAC website. The FLAC website states whether the particular clinic is drop-in or appointment only.

In the majority of clinics any legal query may arise. However, there are several specialist clinics available at a number of locations including family law clinics, immigration law clinics and employment law clinics.

Legal advice is also provided through Irish in a small number of clinics in association with Conradh na Gaeilge.

#### 1.6 What is the role of the Volunteer?

There are two different ways to volunteer in a FLAC clinic – as a **Volunteer Advisor** or as a **Volunteer Assistant**.

**Volunteer Advisors** are solicitors or barristers who are fully qualified to practise law in Ireland. In a FLAC clinic they provide basic legal information, advice and referral to the service users.

A **Volunteer Assistant** has a legal background and some legal training but is not yet fully qualified. They support the work of Volunteer Advisors, by sitting in on sessions in the clinics, filling out the data collection forms, doing on-the-spot internet research and finding relevant leaflets etc. Volunteer Assistants must not provide legal advice to service users, unless under the direct supervision of a Volunteer Advisor. Not all FLAC clinics have a Volunteer Assistant.

#### The Legal Aid Board

Many people get confused between FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres) and the Legal Aid Board.

**FLAC** is a voluntary campaigning organisation, which seeks to highlight the fact that people need legal assistance in order to access justice. We do this through our telephone information line, legal advice clinics around the country as well as through research and advocacy work.

The **Legal Aid Board** is a statutory body, which is responsible for administering the state-run legal aid and advice scheme. Legal aid is not free; there is a requirement to make a financial contribution, which may be waived if it causes undue hardship. Legal Aid is subject to a strict means test and there are a number of exceptions and exclusions to the legal areas covered by legal aid.

## 2 The purpose and parameters of the service

It is important that as a volunteer, you are clear as to what you can and cannot do and that this is explained to the service user at the outset so that expectations are managed. The purpose of the consultation is to provide basic free legal information and advice, and explain the options that are open to the individual. There is usually no follow-up.

The FLAC volunteer ***must not***:

- take on the case;
- refer service users to their own practice or recommend a particular lawyer or firm of solicitors;
- provide legal representation;
- write letters on behalf of the services user;
- provide second opinions for people who have already received legal advice;
- charge or accept payment for advice or offer advice at a reduced fee in the volunteer's practice

Volunteers may assist service users to draft their own correspondence and advise them of the best way to draft simple legal documents, if there is sufficient time within the consultation. Volunteers may print information from the internet, if the facilities are available in the particular clinic, or leaflets available at the clinics can be handed out.

## 3 How a FLAC Clinic Operates

### 3.1 General overview

Volunteer Advisors consult with service users in private interview rooms. Other Volunteer Advisors, during a shadowing session, and Assistants may be present during the consultation.

At the outset of a consultation, in order to manage expectations, volunteers should introduce themselves, and then explain the parameters and purpose of the advice session. This can be done by reading or explaining the contents of the *Initial Statement* (see Initial Statement – Managing Expectations).

When the advisor has heard details of the query and provided advice, they should set out what options are open to the service user, where they may obtain further assistance and what other relevant support services are available.

### 3.2 Referral to legal aid

It is vital that volunteers inform service users who might be eligible for civil legal aid and advice of their right to apply for legal advice and legal aid from the Legal Aid Board. The reverse of the Data Collection Form outlines information on the Legal Aid Board criteria.

### 3.3 Referral to other services

Some service users do not require legal advice and/or may benefit from referral to other services. Volunteers are provided with a list of relevant suggested support organisations.

The duration of the consultation is normally between 15-20 minutes. Volunteer Advisors are usually not expected to see more than 6-8 people each per evening/afternoon. Volunteers are asked to try to stay within a 15- 20 minute time frame. However if a person has a disability, literacy or language difficulties, or the query is particularly complex, the consultation may need to be longer. He/she may be asked to return to a subsequent FLAC clinic or to attend a specialist FLAC service where appropriate.

At drop-in clinics, the number of people attending the clinic will vary from week to week. If more people attend than can reasonably be seen by the Volunteer Advisors on any night, they may be asked to return to the clinic on a subsequent week, or referred to another clinic.

### 3.4 Data Collection Form

At the end of the session, the Volunteer Advisor or Volunteer Assistant must complete a 'Data Collection Form'. This form is not a case note. It does not identify the service user but identifies the issues. These forms are provided in the clinic or are contained within the resource box at the clinic. One form must be completed for each person, recording the areas of law covered and referrals made. Volunteers should assure service users that the form is anonymous and so it is not the collection of personal data.

Volunteers are asked to put all the completed Data Collection Forms into the labelled envelope provided by FLAC and leave it in the post-tray at the Citizens Information Centre or in a sealed envelope on the desk of the interview room, depending on the instructions volunteers have received from their FLAC contact point.

### 3.5 Initial Statement– Managing Expectations

Volunteers are asked to explain or read out the Initial Statement at the beginning of each session. The initial statement is set out at the top of each Data Collection Form.

#### **INITIAL STATEMENT**



My name is x and I am a volunteer with FLAC, the Free Legal Advice Centres. Before we begin I want to make sure you understand what this service involves. This is an anonymous, confidential and free service. I am a lawyer and I am happy to give you whatever legal information and advice I can in this session but cannot take on a case for you, act or write letters on your behalf (but I can write a letter that you can sign). We don't give second opinions if you already have a solicitor. We have about 15- 20 minutes. In addition I may direct you to the Legal Aid Board or to a private solicitor or to another service. I cannot recommend any particular solicitor or firm.

Is that alright?

### 3.6 FLAC's Strategic Litigation

FLAC is an Independent Law Centre and has the capacity to take on a limited number of cases in-house each year, where that case is relevant to the overall mission and strategic objectives of the organisation and has the potential to effect positive change beyond the individual case itself.

If you believe that you may have identified an issue that might be worth consideration by FLAC's in-house legal team, FLAC would welcome hearing about it.

FLAC is developing an online form that volunteers can use to refer potential cases to FLAC. Until a specific form is developed on FLAC's website, volunteers are asked to get the service user's permission to provide their contact details to FLAC. Volunteers may then provide the details by filling in our "contact us" form on FLAC's website. This is a confidential form that FLAC receives via email. Using this form will prevent volunteers having to post contact details of service users on our Data Collection Forms or having to take details from service users out of the clinic. Volunteers can also encourage service users whose case may potentially be taken by FLAC to ring up FLAC and explain their situation and that they were referred by a clinic volunteer from a specific clinic.

However, please do not promise to a service user that FLAC will take on their case, as all decisions need to be made in light of the details of the potential case, FLAC's strategic litigation policy, and the availability of sufficient resources.

### 3.7 Referral to PILA

If the service user's query relates to the work of a social justice organisation it may be possible for that organisation to avail of pro bono legal support through the PILA Pro Bono Referral Scheme. The service user should be referred to the PILA website for further information about the scheme and eligibility criteria, see [www.pila.ie](http://www.pila.ie)

### 3.8 A practical summary chart of Do-s and Don't-s in FLAC clinics

## Do

- ✓ Always explain/read the 'Initial Statement' at the beginning of each consultation
- ✓ Provide advice about Legal Aid and advice if appropriate – see details about this on back of the data collection form.
- ✓ Advise the person as to the next steps they should take
- ✓ Refer service users to other services and organisations as appropriate
- ✓ Print out relevant information, provide leaflets
- ✓ Complete the Data Collection Form
- ✓ Look out for strategic cases

## Don't

- ✗ Take on the case or agree to act on service user's behalf
- ✗ Write letters on the person's behalf or sign documents
- ✗ Refer the service user to your own, or to any private solicitor's practice or give out business cards
- ✗ ~Charge for the advice or offer advice/assistance at a reduced fee in your own practice
- ✗ Encourage or ask people to "come back to you"
- ✗ Take the service user's contact details or provide your own contact details
- ✗ Promise that FLAC will take their case

## 4 Volunteer Support

### 4.1 Recruitment

FLAC recruits volunteers on an ongoing basis. A FLAC volunteer must be either a barrister or a solicitor who is eligible to practice law in Ireland and is in good standing with their professional body. They must have an understanding of, or willingness to learn, the legal areas in which the FLAC clinic provides advice. They must keep up to date with any guidance provided by their professional bodies.

The first step is to complete a Volunteer Registration form which is available on the FLAC website. When we have received and processed your form, we will contact you and ask you to sign our FLAC Volunteer Declaration and Agreement form and send it back to us. Volunteer placement will depend on matching the skills and needs of the volunteer to the needs of the FLAC clinics. Each application will be considered on its individual merits with the applicant's qualifications, previous experience and availability all taken into account. FLAC is an equal opportunities employer and these principles apply equally to recruitment of prospective volunteers.

Prospective volunteers must read these Guidelines and then sign a Volunteer Declaration and Agreement form which confirms adherence to these Guidelines and a commitment to the values and policies of FLAC.

Details of the volunteer given in the registration form will be kept on FLAC's database. FLAC will treat all information collected in the recruitment process confidentially and in accordance with FLAC's Data Protection Policy.

No contractual relationship exists between FLAC and its volunteers or is to be implied.

Volunteers are expected to volunteer on average once a month for at least a one year period. This may be less frequent in clinics where there is only a monthly service. FLAC usually does not have short term volunteer opportunities.

### 4.2 FLAC Point of Contact

As a new volunteer, you will be introduced to your FLAC Point of Contact. This person will be the person who will contact you in relation to your 'shadowing' and your rostering, and you can address all your practical queries to this person in relation to your attendance, etc. If you need to cancel, you must get in touch with your Point of Contact as soon as possible.

### 4.3 Induction

The following have been put in place to assist volunteers who are just starting out with FLAC:

- Information Email: Volunteer Advisors and Volunteer Assistants will be forwarded an electronic information pack as part of their induction. The email pack contains links to useful online resources that are available, as well as a list of relevant support services.

- Shadowing: Before they begin volunteering, all volunteer advisors will sit in and observe at least one session where they shadow the Volunteer and Clinics Coordinator, or another volunteer who has been in a volunteer advisor role for a while. Volunteers may ask for additional 'shadowing' sessions if they feel that that would be helpful.
- Induction Session: Several times a year, we organise induction sessions for groups of volunteers to ensure that they have a clear understanding of how their contribution fits into the overall work of FLAC, and we discuss these Guidelines in more detail. All volunteers are required to attend an Induction Session.

#### 4.4 Rostering & Scheduling

Volunteers are usually asked to volunteer approximately once a month. In clinics that only run once a month, volunteers may be asked to volunteer less frequently than this. Volunteers are generally placed at one particular clinic where they volunteer each time. Four to six monthly rosters are drawn up in advance, and volunteers are given an opportunity to input into the roster. This roster is circulated, and it is available from the FLAC Point of Contact.

When you begin volunteering, you will be advised how the roster for your particular clinic is managed and you will be furnished with a copy of the roster.

You will be sent a reminder the before you are due to volunteer and you will be asked to confirm your availability.

#### 4.5 Supporting attendance

We endeavour to ensure that clinics do not have to be cancelled, and we appreciate your cooperation in this regard. If you have to cancel your planned session at a FLAC clinic we ask that you give your FLAC Point of Contact as much notice as possible so that we can try and find an alternative volunteer who can fill in. If you as a duty volunteer, have to cancel at short notice, please phone your FLAC Point of Contact at the very first opportunity. Volunteers are asked to make reasonable efforts to liaise with their fellow FLAC registered volunteers to organise a replacement or swap. However, non- FLAC registered volunteers should not step in.

You may be contacted at short notice to see if you can fill in or swap your planned session in order to cover a cancellation, and we really appreciate if you can facilitate us in this regard.

#### 4.6 "Summer squad"

We ask volunteers to help us to keep the clinics going between June and September. When you plan to go on holidays, tell us in advance, so we can count in your absence (especially if you are rostered for that time or if you are not sure when you are rostered).

Every year, volunteers are asked to join the FLAC Summer Squad. Members of the squad offer additional time that they would be willing to volunteer in their usual clinic on certain weeks or days, or in another clinic.

We are particularly grateful to volunteers who make themselves available for additional clinics to ensure that the services are provided throughout the summer.



## 4.7 Training

FLAC regularly organises free training events on legal topics and developments that support the work of volunteers in the clinics. Training courses are generally eligible for CPD points. We welcome feedback on the training needs of volunteers.

## 4.8 Insurance

The Citizens Information Board provides Professional Indemnity Insurance cover for volunteer solicitors and barristers providing consultations to service users at FLAC clinics based in Citizens Information Centres. FLAC provides Professional Indemnity Insurance cover for volunteer solicitors and barristers providing consultations to people at FLAC clinics based in premises which are not Citizens Information Centres. This Professional Indemnity Insurance cover in both circumstances is provided on the clear understanding that the role of the volunteer advisor is limited to assisting people to see if they have a problem to which there may be a legal solution, to explain what options are open to them and to identify where they may obtain further assistance if necessary. As stated previously, volunteers may not take on any cases or represent people attending FLAC clinics.

## 4.9 Individual support

The Volunteer Development Manager or the Volunteer and Clinics Coordinator are available to support volunteers and to discuss any matters regarding volunteering with FLAC. The Manager or the Coordinator regularly visits FLAC clinics to seek feedback from volunteers and to discuss matters that may concern them. Volunteers may contact their FLAC Point of Contact in relation to practical elements of their volunteering.

## 4.10 Events & Networking opportunities

Volunteers are encouraged to attend other FLAC events such as its annual lecture. These are opportunities for volunteers to get to know each other and to build their professional and social network.

## 4.11 Volunteer Awards

FLAC has an awards scheme to formally acknowledge the commitment and support of the volunteers and to celebrate the role of volunteers in their communities.

To qualify for the award, a volunteer should have volunteered regularly (normally 10 or more times per year) for the previous 3 years, or have contributed equivalent volunteer support to FLAC in another way. The Award consists of inclusion on FLAC's Roll of Long Service Volunteers, a special golden FLAC lapel pin and a certificate. Volunteers may be nominated for an award by the Volunteer Development Manager or the Development Managers at Citizens Information Services.

## 5 Volunteer Code of Conduct - Confidentiality and Professional Standards

Volunteers are expected to perform their roles in the free legal advice clinics with commitment to FLAC's values and mission which are set out below.

### 5.1 Professional Development and Awareness of Services Available

Volunteers must have an understanding of, or willingness to learn, the legal areas in which the FLAC clinic provides advice and the legal and social services to which service users may be referred.

Volunteers may not advise in FLAC clinics unless they are eligible to practise as a solicitor or barrister in Ireland and are in good standing with their professional bodies.

Volunteers have a responsibility to uphold the professionalism and strict ethical standards of a legal professional and to apply the law. They must keep up to date with any guidance provided by their professional bodies. FLAC expects and requires volunteers to abide by the standards and codes of conduct that apply to their profession, and the law and if in doubt in relation to any professional or ethical matter to consult with their professional body.

The usual high standards of confidentiality and in relation to avoiding conflicts of interest which pertain to legal professional practice apply to the work of the clinics.

### 5.2 Conflicts of Interest

If a volunteer perceives a possible conflict of interest, whether personal or professional between themselves and the service user, this should be fully disclosed to the person who should be given the opportunity and advised to see another advisor at the clinic, or another clinic.

A volunteer should not provide advice to more than one of the parties engaged in a particular dispute. The volunteer must explain to the service user that a conflict of interest exists, and they may consult another FLAC Volunteer, even if it means the person returning to the service on a subsequent evening.

### 5.3 Child protection

FLAC does not provide legal information and advice to children in the FLAC clinics. The FLAC clinics are aimed at adults and volunteers should not be providing advice to children at any stage. Volunteers should not provide legal information and advice to a service user at a clinic if the person is not an adult. If in doubt, volunteers should ask the person to verify their age. People under 18 should be asked to return with a parent or a guardian.

### 5.4 Reporting of abuse

The provisions of the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 are applicable to everyone.

Under this Act, it is a criminal offence to withhold information about a serious offence, including a sexual offence, against a person under 18 years or a vulnerable person. The offence arises where a person knows

or believes that a specified offence has been committed against a child or vulnerable person and he or she has information which would help arrest, prosecute or convict another person for that offence, but fails without reasonable excuse to disclose that information, as soon as it is practicable to do so, to a member of An Garda Síochána.

Volunteers offer a confidential, legal advice service through the FLAC clinics. The duty of confidentiality and legal professional privilege which apply in relation to the provision of legal advice may, in some circumstances, constitute a reasonable excuse for failing to report. Identifying where the line falls between the breach of duty to report certain offences and professional duties of confidentiality in relation to information received for the purposes of providing legal advice may be challenging, as there is not yet a body of case law under the 2012 Act to guide decision making.

Where a barrister or solicitor has a concern in a particular instance in relation to their duties of confidentiality and legal professional privilege, they should check the guidance published by their professional bodies. If in doubt in relation to any professional or ethical matter a volunteer should consult with their professional body.

FLAC will provide assistance is seeking guidance on a volunteer's responsibilities in a particular instance.

## 5.5 Communication

Volunteers are requested to stay in touch with their FLAC Point of Contact, and advise of any relevant matters arising in relation to the running of the clinics, including comments or complaints received from service users. In particular, volunteers must notify FLAC Point of Contact of any matter involving their safety or security or the safety and security of service users. Any ideas or suggestions from volunteers for developing and improving the service are also greatly appreciated.

## 5.6 Dignity and Respect

FLAC is committed to ensuring that service users and volunteers are treated with respect and dignity. Volunteers must respect the diversity of service users and service users must respect the diversity of volunteers. Volunteers must be non-judgemental, courteous and supportive towards people using the service and provide information in a professional and sensitive manner.

## 5.7 Equality and Diversity

FLAC is committed to combating discrimination, accommodating diversity and promoting equality for service users and volunteers across the grounds of discrimination as required and permitted by The Equal Status Act 2000-2016. FLAC seeks to ensure that the service provided to service users and volunteers:

- Is free from discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and victimisation;
- Makes reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities and accommodates diversity across the protected grounds and implements positive action measures.

The grounds of discrimination include gender, civil status, family status, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, religion, and membership of the Traveller community.

FLAC will not tolerate discrimination, sexual harassment, harassment or victimisation of service users or volunteers, by employees, service users, volunteers, and other people that the service users and volunteers may come in contact with while attending the FLAC clinic. Any allegations of such behaviour will be investigated by FLAC and if upheld, such behaviour may lead to appropriate actions such as termination of the consultation, exclusion from the premises, or termination/suspension of volunteering. The volunteer will be requested to cooperate with an investigation and failure to cooperate may result in termination/suspension of volunteering.

Any complaints of discrimination or harassment (including sexual harassment) should be brought to the Volunteer Development Manager as soon as possible.

## 5.8 Accessibility and Reasonable Accommodation

FLAC is committed to making our services as accessible as possible. FLAC seeks to provide an environment where a person with a disability can identify what their needs are and how these might be met and FLAC will provide reasonable accommodation, subject to resources.

The FLAC clinics are located mostly in Citizens Information Centres, which are wheelchair accessible.

The FLAC clinic at Cabra CIC offers Irish Sign Language Interpretation.

Some service users may have language difficulties, a low level of literacy, an intellectual disability, or a mental health issue, and may require more time.

If you feel that the clinic is inaccessible to the service user or that the service user has particular needs that you cannot meet, please contact your FLAC Point of Contact. FLAC will endeavor to provide an alternative method of making the service available, subject to resources.

## 5.9 Health and Safety

FLAC is committed to providing a safe environment for all volunteers. FLAC clinics are held in premises that are not controlled or managed by FLAC.

Volunteers should never be present in clinics on their own. There should either be another FLAC volunteer, or a staff member or volunteer from the Citizens Information Centre or other community facility housing the FLAC clinic present.

Any incident involving an accident or injury or any perceived safety or health risk should be reported to the person in charge of the premises and FLAC Point of contact/Volunteer Development Manager.

Volunteers should all comply with all health and safety instructions provided by Citizens Information Centre or Community Centre.

## 5.10 Aggressive and Abusive Behaviour

The safety and welfare of volunteers and CIC staff at the clinics is paramount. People attending FLAC clinics are generally seeking advice or guidance on a difficult situation that they find themselves in. This is inherently stressful

and can manifest itself in different ways, with the service user possibly appearing angry, upset or frustrated. People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress.

In a very small number of cases, the action and behaviour of a service user may be unacceptable. FLAC will not tolerate harassment of any kind of its volunteers. Volunteers should not have to deal with a person who is threatening, abusive, or intoxicated with drugs or alcohol. Any aggression or abuse directed towards a volunteer will not be tolerated. This includes behaviour such as language (whether written or verbal) that may cause a volunteer to feel afraid, threatened or abused, and may include threats, personal verbal abuse, or derogatory remarks. Remarks of a racial or discriminatory nature and harassment will also not be tolerated.

Unreasonable demands and unreasonable level of contacts will also not be tolerated. This includes service users that takes up an excessive amount of time and in so doing disadvantages other service users.

If a volunteer experiences threatening, abusive or unreasonable behaviour, they should terminate the consultation and seek help from another member of staff or volunteer if necessary.

The volunteer should take time out, and if possible discuss the incident with another volunteer and FLAC point of contact to “debrief”.

If a volunteer is aware that a fellow volunteer is dealing with a difficult service user, they should be prepared to provide support as appropriate, but without putting themselves at risk.

Any incident involving a difficult/ abusive service user must be reported to the person in charge of the premises, and if appropriate the An Garda Síochána. The FLAC Point of Contact and the Volunteer Development Manager should also be informed as soon as possible.

FLAC will provide training to volunteers for dealing with difficult service users on a regular basis.

## 5.11 Complaints

FLAC is committed to providing a high quality service to those who need it. However, sometimes people may feel that the FLAC service they have received, or tried to receive, is unsatisfactory. We encourage feedback, both positive and negative, on all aspects of our policy and operations, so that we can maintain and improve standards on an ongoing basis. Complaints are taken seriously and dealt with promptly. They are handled with an open mind and investigated thoroughly.

Anyone using or trying to use FLAC’s services can make a complaint. This includes volunteers, and service users to FLAC clinics. FLAC does not respond to anonymous complaints. If a volunteer wishes to make a complaint they should contact the Volunteer Development Manager. If a complaint is made against

### Satisfaction Surveys

From time to time FLAC will conduct Satisfaction Surveys to assess the perceived quality and adequacy of service provided to service users.

Findings from these surveys may be discussed with volunteers if appropriate, to further develop the level of service provided.

a clinic volunteer, it will be passed on to the Volunteer Development Manager /Volunteers and Clinics Co-ordinator who will notify the volunteer of the complaint and will ask them for their perspective on the complaint. Volunteers are encouraged to give their comments as soon as requested with a view to resolving the complaint as fairly and quickly as possible.

#### 5.12 Unsatisfactory Performance/ Non-compliance with Volunteer Guidelines

Compliance with these volunteer guidelines is compulsory. In the rare event that a volunteer is not able to fulfil their duties adequately, and /or fails to comply with these Volunteer Guidelines, the volunteer may be asked not to volunteer further.

#### 5.13 Ending your Volunteering

Due to changing life circumstances, you may have to resign from your volunteer involvement. We understand this, and will take the opportunity to thank you for your contribution to date. It might be possible that you will return to volunteering at a later point, when your circumstances allow it. We just ask that you give us as much notice as possible before resigning, although we appreciate that this is not always possible.

We may ask you to complete an online exit survey and we encourage you to give feedback regarding your experience to FLAC in order to improve the service provided and the management of volunteers.

## 6 About FLAC

### 6.1 Structure and Governance

FLAC is a human rights organisation which exists to promote equal access to justice for all.

FLAC is a charity. It is registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority (Registered Charity Number: 20010256). It is also an independent law centre under the terms of the Solicitors Acts 1954-2011 (Independent Law Centres) Regulations 2006, SI 103/2006.

FLAC is governed by a voluntary board, FLAC National Council, and has a staff team led by its Chief Executive, Eilis Barry. FLAC has one office, on Dorset Street, Dublin 1.

FLAC is funded through a combination of donations and grants from the legal profession, statutory bodies, philanthropic foundations, and fundraising. Its accounts are audited every year and are available on the FLAC website.

### 6.2 How FLAC Works

FLAC is involved in a variety of different activities in the pursuit of access to justice and the use of law in the public interest.

*Advice and Information:* Through the telephone information line, network of legal advice clinics and its website, FLAC provides free legal information and advice to thousands of people all around Ireland every year.

*Analysis:* FLAC conducts in-depth research and expert analysis of a number of core legal topics: state-funded legal aid, social welfare law, personal debt law, consumer credit law, and other issues impacting on access to justice.

*Advocacy:* FLAC advocates for changes to the law, or changes to the way in which the law is applied, through its campaigns and strategic litigation in the public interest.

PILA (Public Interest Law Alliance) is FLAC's public interest law network that seeks to engage civil society and the legal community in using the law to advance social change. PILA runs a Pro Bono Referral Scheme that connects social justice organisations with free legal expertise. NGO partners can obtain free legal assistance where they do not have the resources or in-house expertise, in the following ways: legal advice, law reform working groups, litigation support, legal education sessions and signature projects.

PILA's services are targeted at organisations who are working for the benefit of disadvantaged and marginalised people in Ireland. You can learn more about PILA on its dedicated website [www.pila.ie](http://www.pila.ie).



### 6.3 Other opportunities for Volunteering with FLAC

Volunteers are involved in a range of other activities across the organisation including:

- The development of legal information leaflets and resources
- Training and presentations for FLAC staff and volunteers and PILA seminars
- PILA volunteers – solicitors, barristers, law firms, legal academics who are members of the PILA pro bono register see above
- Office volunteers who provide administrative and legal supports in FLAC's day to day work
- The members of FLAC's National Council all volunteer their time and expertise for the governance of the organisation

### 6.4 FLAC's mission

FLAC is a human rights organisation which exists to promote equal access to all.

### 6.5 Our Organisational Values

All of FLAC's work is guided by its commitment to the following values, values which we also expect volunteers to commit to:

#### *Co-operation*

FLAC will work with other organisations to better achieve our goals and objectives.

#### *Equality and non-discrimination*

FLAC is committed to respect for others and to the elimination of discrimination in all its forms.

#### *Independence*

FLAC is an independent organisation. Our governance, programmes and policies will be non-partisan and independent.

#### *Respect for universal human rights principles*

FLAC seeks to advance international and national standards that promote human rights and recognises that human rights are fundamental to everyone and permeate all areas of law.

#### *Social responsibility*

FLAC has a sense of social responsibility which inspires the organisation to work with and support those in need.

#### *Valuing staff*

FLAC respects the individual skills and abilities of staff and interns and promotes good work practices. We value staff excellence, accountability and creativity and support their professional development.

#### *Volunteers*

FLAC values its volunteers and acknowledges that they are a core component in building a society which provides equal access to justice.

#### *Working with integrity*

In carrying out its goals and objectives, FLAC aims to conduct its work with integrity, high standards and professionalism.



Should you wish to give us feedback in relation these Volunteer Guidelines or your volunteer involvement, please do not hesitate to contact us on [volunteers@flac.ie](mailto:volunteers@flac.ie).

Thank you for volunteering with FLAC!



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