



# FLAC

## Volunteer Policy and Guidelines

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FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres)

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction and Policy.....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	3
1.2 Scope and Purpose.....	3
1.3 Volunteer Policy Statement.....	3
<b>2. About FLAC.....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Vision.....	4
2.2 Mission.....	4
2.3 How FLAC works.....	4
2.4 Values.....	6
2.5 Who runs FLAC & what is it's Legal Status.....	6
<b>3. About The Legal Advice Centres.....</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1 Aims of the Centres.....	6
3.2 Operation of the Centres.....	7
3.3 Our Callers.....	7
<b>4. The Roles of Volunteers in FLAC.....</b>	<b>7</b>
4.1 Definition of Volunteering.....	7
4.2 Volunteer roles within FLAC.....	8
<b>5. Volunteer Management in FLAC.....</b>	<b>9</b>
5.1 Volunteer Person Specifications.....	9
5.2 The Recruitment Process.....	10
5.3 Volunteer Induction.....	10
<b>6. Volunteer Management and Support.....</b>	<b>11</b>
6.1 Volunteer Administration and Centre Volunteers.....	11
6.2 Volunteer Support.....	12
<b>7. Guidelines for FLAC Centre Volunteers.....</b>	<b>15</b>
7.1 How a Session Happens in the Centres.....	15
7.2 Referrals.....	16
7.3 Awareness of Potential Test Cases.....	16
7.4 Data Collection Programme.....	17
7.5 Volunteer's Responsibilities.....	17
7.6 Working with Citizens Information Centres (CIC).....	18
7.7 Caller Satisfaction Surveys.....	19
7.8 Disengagement of Volunteers.....	19
<b>8. Challenges in Volunteering.....</b>	<b>19</b>
8.1 Volunteers Responsibility for Health and Safety.....	19
8.2 Dealing with Callers.....	19
8.3 Problem Behaviour.....	20
8.4 Opening Hours.....	20
8.5 Inappropriate Behaviour and Complaints.....	21
8.6 Harassment Policy.....	21
<b>9. Contact details.....</b>	<b>21</b>

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

FLAC acknowledges the importance of its volunteers and treats them as essential stakeholders of the organisation. FLAC appreciates the time, expertise and commitment volunteers offer and seeks to ensure that in return our volunteers are treated and managed in the most professional and considerate manner possible.

## **1.2 SCOPE AND PURPOSE**

This document aims to give FLAC volunteers a thorough understanding of our policies, procedures and guidelines for volunteers. The guidelines are the version approved by FLAC's National Council as of September 2013. These will be updated from time to time.

The guidelines are addressed to those volunteers directly managed from FLAC's office in Dublin. However, most of these guidelines will be equally applicable to FLAC volunteers in all centres around the country and can be adapted by the local managing Citizens Information Centre or other managing organisation as suitable.

The current version of the guidelines will be circulated electronically to all volunteers on FLAC's database and to all CICs that run a FLAC service at the beginning of every calendar year. The current version will also be available on FLAC's website.

Volunteers should endeavour to ensure that they are familiar with the up to date version of the guidelines.

## **1.3 VOLUNTEER POLICY STATEMENT**

Since FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres) was established in 1969, it has depended on the dedication and the efforts of volunteers. FLAC volunteers are involved with FLAC's work in a number of ways. Through their work, our volunteers support some of the most disadvantaged people in our communities, and assist them to realise their right to access justice.

FLAC seeks to involve volunteers in order to

- Maintain the network of Free Legal Advice Centres
- Assist advisors in the Free Legal Advice Centres
- Provide educational talks, training and presentations for local communities
- Register and work with FLAC's PILA *Pro Bono* initiatives
- Support FLAC's work in a research capacity or in working groups
- Support FLAC's work in an administrative capacity
- Support FLAC's work through the work of its National Council, which is the governing body of FLAC.

FLAC is committed to its volunteers and acknowledges the importance of their commitment to FLAC's aims, mission and values and as such, FLAC intends to carry out highest level of best practice in every aspect of volunteer management.

FLAC values the contribution of its volunteers and seeks to recognise and promote this by:

- acknowledging that the relationship between FLAC and its volunteers is a reciprocal one
- providing opportunities for the development of volunteers' skills and experience

- providing support in the form of clear guidelines and role descriptions, induction, training, consultation, resource packs, one-to one support , networking opportunities, volunteer recognition and by ensuring high-quality best practice in management practices.

## **2. ABOUT FLAC**

### **2.1 VISION**

FLAC's vision is of a society where everyone can access fair and accountable mechanisms to vindicate their rights

### **2.2 MISSION**

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

### **2.3 How FLAC WORKS**

FLAC is involved in a wide range of activities in pursuit of its mission of equal access to justice for all:

**Advocacy:** FLAC highlights the need for reform and improved public policy through advocacy and the development of public campaigns with strategic partners focused on raising awareness of the need for reform among the public and target groups and building support for change.

**Legal information:** FLAC offers a range of services to the public intended to increase access to justice. We operate an information and referral telephone service which is open Monday to Friday. We produce a range of information leaflets and resources on a various aspects of law. FLAC also promotes and facilitates the provision of legal information to the public by volunteer lawyers through its legal advice centres and websites.

**Public Interest Law:** FLAC has developed and runs a project, the Public Interest Law Alliance (PILA) which works to encourage academics, students, lawyers and NGOs to use law for the benefit of disadvantaged and marginalised groups and to encourage the involvement of legal firms and lawyers in Public Interest Law work. As part of that work, we run a referral scheme that matches lawyers' skills to specific legal assistance requests from non-governmental organisations, law centres and community organisations that promote the public interest.

**Research and analysis:** FLAC monitors the use of law and law reforms underway and raises awareness of reforms necessary through the production of research reports, briefing papers, submissions and information leaflets.

**Strategic litigation:** strategic litigation is carried out by FLAC where it is felt that the outcome of a specific case has a wider impact and can contribute to changing the law or the use of law. This can involve FLAC bringing cases to the Irish courts or international fora, supporting

appeals of Legal Aid Board decisions and supporting appeals to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

**Support to our volunteers:** FLAC supports the work of volunteer lawyers by providing legal information and on-going training and support.

**Technical legal support:** We provide second-tier technical legal support to the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and to the network of Citizens Information Centres. We also work closely with and provide legal support to a range of NGOs working in FLAC's areas of interest.

The above activities can be grouped under three broad headings: Advice and Information, Analysis, and Advocacy. Each of these activities is a powerful tool in its own right, but it is in combining them that FLAC is able to make the biggest impact.



## 2.4 VALUES:

FLAC's Strategic Plan highlights the following core values which guide all of our work towards achieving our Mission and Vision:

- *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.

## **2.5 WHO RUNS FLAC & WHAT IS ITS LEGAL STATUS**

FLAC is an independent human rights organisation. It is a company limited by guarantee, not having a share capital (Company Reg. No. 49413) and is recognised by the Revenue Commissioners for charitable purposes (CHY No. 6097). FLAC is also an independent law centre under the terms of the Solicitors Acts 1954 -2002 (Independent Law Centres) Regulations 2006, SI 103/2006.

FLAC is governed by a board of directors known as the National Council and is managed by its Director General. FLAC has one office, at 13 Lower Dorset St, Dublin 1 where its team of staff and interns work, with occasional assistance from volunteers.

Full details of FLAC's structure, including current members of the National Council, staff and interns can be found on FLAC's website at [www.flac.ie](http://www.flac.ie).

## **3. ABOUT THE LEGAL ADVICE CENTRES**

### **3.1 AIMS OF THE CENTRES**

Our aims are to increase access to justice, including access to law by:

- ***Empowering people in Ireland to understand and use the law as it affects them through providing quality first stop legal information and advice and a referral service. It is open to all but is aimed at those who are unable to afford advice from a solicitor in private practice or who are waiting to avail of their right to a state funded legal service.***
- ***Collecting standardised data from our callers to assist FLAC in its analysis of unmet legal need to inform its research and law reform objectives.***

### **3.2 OPERATION OF THE CENTRES**

A FLAC Centre is a regular community service, supported by FLAC and staffed by volunteers, which provides first stop legal information and advice to members of the public who attend ("callers"). An up to date list of all FLAC Centres around Ireland is available on FLAC's website, at [www.flac.ie](http://www.flac.ie).

Our Centres operate principally in partnership with Citizens Information Centres (CICs), run by the Citizens Information Board, a statutory body funded by the Department of Social Protection. Centres that don't operate from CICs usually run in cooperation with local community resource centres. Some FLAC Centres, including those in Cork city and most of those in Dublin are managed by FLAC, ("FLAC-managed Centres"). Other Legal Advice Centres are organised and managed directly by the Citizens Information Centre which hosts them.

Many Centres use an appointment system, where appointments are made by the staff of the Citizens Information Centres during the opening hours of the CICs. There are some Centres that operate on a "drop in/ first-come, first-served" basis.

As set out in our aims, the centres provide first stop legal information and advice and a referral service.

The time needed for consultation with callers will vary considerably. However, volunteers are asked to stay within a 15- 20 minute time frame where possible. If occasionally a longer time is needed, then the caller may be asked to return to a subsequent FLAC clinic or to attend a specialist FLAC service where appropriate.

At our "drop in" Centres, the number of callers attending the Centre will vary from week to week. If more callers attend than can reasonably be seen by the Volunteer Advisors on any night, it is FLAC policy that they may be asked to return to the Centre on a subsequent week, or referred to another Centre. FLAC volunteers are usually not expected to see more than 6-8 callers each per evening/afternoon.

### **3.3 OUR CALLERS**

The Free Legal Advice Centres are open to all - there is no application procedure or means test. While the aim of the centres is to assist those who cannot afford to engage a private solicitor or whose access to the law is blocked in some other way, Volunteer Advisors will not turn anyone away who seeks their assistance.

Those who seek our assistance at FLAC centres are 'callers', not 'clients'. FLAC Volunteer Advisors do not have a solicitor-client or barrister-client relationship with those who come to the centres and it is therefore inaccurate to call them clients.

## **4. THE ROLES OF VOLUNTEERS IN FLAC**

### **4.1 DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERING**

Volunteering is the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society, local communities, individuals outside the immediate family, the environment or any other causes. Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person's own free will, without payment.



## 4.2 VOLUNTEER ROLES WITHIN FLAC

Volunteers fulfil different roles within FLAC. These different roles require different skills, qualifications and commitment levels but share FLAC's passion for making law more accessible.

1. Volunteer Advisors are solicitors or barristers fully qualified to practise in Ireland and give private consultations to members of the community who visit our centres. Volunteer Advisors provide this service only in our FLAC centres. *Volunteer advisors are considered as Centre Volunteers*
2. Volunteer Assistants have significant legal background and support the work of Volunteer Advisors. They do this by sitting in with the Advisors at the sessions in the centres, filling out our data collection forms, doing on-the-spot internet research, finding relevant leaflets in our resource folders, and generally supporting our Advisors as the Advisors require it. They may also work at reception in cooperation with the Citizens' Information Centre (CIC) staff, welcoming callers and managing the appointment system during the clinics. Volunteer Assistants must not, under any circumstances, provide legal advice to callers, unless under the direct supervision of a Volunteer Advisor. *Volunteer assistants are considered as Centre Volunteers*
3. FLAC National Council members are the board of FLAC who volunteer their time and expertise to direct and oversee the management of the organisation and its policies.
4. Members of Panels of Experts are solicitors or barristers fully qualified to practise in Ireland who provide information, support and expertise to FLAC in the development of legal information resources. These volunteers are highly experienced experts in different areas of law with at least 5 years recent experience in the area of law where they are providing assistance.
5. Members of a Panel of Speakers are highly qualified and experienced solicitors or barristers fully qualified to practise in Ireland who are expert in their area of law and also are skilled in public speaking. From time to time FLAC is asked to deliver training events and talks on different areas of law for community groups and organisations and members of this panel fulfil that function.
6. PILA volunteers are solicitors and barristers, law firms, legal academics and law students who, by signing up to the PILA pro bono register or, if a law firm, signing a protocol with PILA, work with non-governmental organisations to advance the use of law in the public interest through legal education, law reform, advice and litigation.
7. Office / administrative volunteers, support FLAC's everyday work in our offices bringing in their skills, their fresh eyes, and enthusiasm for the work we do.

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



## **VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT IN FLAC**

### **5. RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS**

#### **5.1. VOLUNTEER PERSON SPECIFICATIONS:**

##### *All Volunteers*

- Must have a commitment to social justice and the principle of access to justice
- Must have a commitment to professionalism
- Must be able to work as part of a team
- Must recognise that their responsibility as volunteers is to continue to commit the time and energy that they agreed to commit when they became volunteers until they cease in that role
- Must be able to show tolerance and patience in different or difficult situations
- Must be over 18 years of age

In addition to the above person specifications which apply to all volunteers, volunteers in FLAC centres must also meet the following additional person specifications:

##### *Volunteer Advisors*

- Must have an understanding of, or willingness to learn, the legal areas in which the legal centre provides advice and assistance to the community
- Must have a willingness to empathise with callers
- Must be a solicitor or barrister qualified to practise in Ireland.
- Must be in good standing with their professional body and capable of being fully licensed to practise.

##### *Volunteer Assistants*

- Must have an understanding of, or willingness to learn, the legal areas in which the Advisor is providing advice and assistance to the community
- Must have a willingness to empathise with callers
- Must have a significant legal background. What is significant is determined by FLAC policy from time to time.

#### **5.2 THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS**

The volunteer recruitment process will vary between FLAC-managed Centres and other Legal Advice Centres (see section 3.2).

Those interested in volunteering in a FLAC managed centre or who want to volunteer for FLAC's expert or speaker panels, or to help with other tasks outside of the work of centres, will complete a Volunteer Registration form and will send this to FLAC's Volunteer and Centres Manager at FLAC's office in Dublin. FLAC will contact the prospective volunteer directly in due course.

Those who are interested in volunteering in other Legal Advice Centres will contact their local Citizens Information Centre and must meet the requirements and policies of that centre.

Alternatively, they can contact our Volunteer and Centres Manager who will forward their details to their local Citizens Information Centre who will then deal with them directly.

FLAC recruits volunteers on an ongoing basis. When necessary, FLAC runs recruitment campaigns through its website as well as through other agencies such as the Law Society or the Voluntary Assistance Scheme of the Bar Council of Ireland. In addition, volunteers will often find FLAC through other paths (such as word of mouth, events, etc.).

Volunteer placement will depend on matching the needs of the volunteer to the needs of FLAC. Each application will be considered on its individual merits. The applicant's qualifications, previous experience and availability will be relevant. Volunteers will also have to confirm their commitment to the aims, values, policies and philosophy of FLAC (see section 2)

FLAC is an equal opportunities employer and that these principles apply equally to recruitment of prospective volunteers.

Volunteers, before signing the registration form must read FLAC's Volunteer Policy and Guidelines, as by signing it, prospective volunteers agree to abide by it.

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.

Volunteers are offered a volunteer placement via email and are expected to confirm that the offered placement is suitable for them.

Volunteers are expected to volunteer on average once a month for at least a one year period. FLAC usually does not have short term volunteer opportunities. Volunteers who wish to volunteer for a shorter period of time should notify FLAC from the outset and it is at the discretion of the Volunteer and Centres Manager whether they will be considered for volunteering on a short term basis.

### **5.3 VOLUNTEER INDUCTION.**

It is important to FLAC that all its volunteers feel confident in their volunteer role and understand the importance of their contribution to FLAC's achievements.

- *Induction Session*

FLAC organises induction sessions for its volunteers to ensure that they have a clear understanding of how their contribution fits into the overall work of FLAC. Volunteers are also briefed on FLAC's Volunteer Policy. While they are valuable in gaining an understanding of FLAC's work, induction sessions are not a precondition of the commencing of volunteering.

#### **Specific to Centre Volunteers:**

- *Volunteer Information Packs*

Volunteer Advisors and Volunteer Assistants will be given an information pack as part of their induction. The pack contains useful resources that are also placed in the Centres in *Resource Packs* there. Volunteers are asked to familiarise themselves with the contents of the information pack, as it may help them in fulfilling their role in the centres.

- *Shadowing*

Before they begin volunteering, all volunteer advisors will “sit in” and observe at least one session where they shadow another volunteer who has been in the same role for a while. Volunteers may ask for additional ‘shadowing’ sessions if they feel that they would be helpful.

## **6. VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

FLAC acknowledges the importance of its volunteers’ work and employs a full time Volunteer and Centres Manager to manage and support the work of volunteers. FLAC will support its volunteers in every way it can as FLAC acknowledges that well supported volunteers are key to successful volunteer programmes.

### **6.1 VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION OF CENTRE VOLUNTEERS**

- *Rostering / Scheduling*

FLAC-managed centres and other Legal advice centres might have different volunteer management systems in place. The following is the description of the FLAC managed centres. Most Dublin city and Cork city centres are scheduled directly by FLAC.

Volunteers are usually asked to volunteer once a month. They are generally placed at one particular centre where they volunteer each time.

Four-monthly rotas are drawn up for each centre three times a year. The volunteer is given an opportunity to input into the rota. The Volunteer and Centres Manager circulates a timetable and asks volunteers to specify the dates on which they would prefer to volunteer. The Manager then prepares a draft schedule where everybody is listed for times that are suitable for them. This draft schedule is circulated to volunteers. They are asked to check the schedule and tell the Volunteer and Centres Manager if any of the dates on the draft schedule do not suit them so that the timetable can be finalised and distributed. This process is facilitated through ‘doodle polls’ <http://www.doodle.com/>.

## Poll "Sample FLAC Centre, Sample Street"

<http://doodle.com/2bp9xs7cvpb47pgu>

	September 2013				October 2013					November 2013				December 2013	
	Tue 3	Tue 10	Tue 17	Tue 24	Tue 1	Tue 8	Tue 15	Tue 22	Tue 29	Tue 5	Tue 12	Tue 19	Tue 26	Tue 3	Tue 10
	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM
Joe Volunteer	OK	OK				OK						OK			OK
Mary			OK				OK	OK			OK			OK	
Paula	OK				OK					OK				OK	
Jim		OK			OK						OK				
Catherine			OK				OK					OK			
Colman				OK					OK				OK		
Ciaran				OK		OK		OK		OK					OK
James									OK				OK		
Count	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

Sample doodle calendar for the scheduling of the centres

Volunteers also receive a reminder on the Thursday before they are due to volunteer in their centres. The reminder is sent via email in conjunction with important information regarding the operation of the centres. Volunteers are asked to read this email and respond to it to confirm their attendance. Volunteers who do not confirm their availability via email are contacted by text message the day before they are due to volunteer and the morning of their volunteering as well, if necessary. If volunteers do not reply to any of the text messages, they will be followed up by a phone call. All of these reminders are issued by the Volunteer and Centres Manager.

- **Cancellations**

Cancellations are very unfortunate events in the Centres, but sometimes they do happen. Volunteers not turning up at their scheduled time in centres without notice can damage FLAC's reputation and that of its volunteers and also will leave our callers without the information and advice that they need, sometimes leaving them in very vulnerable situations.

If volunteers have to cancel a shift, they are asked to let FLAC know as soon as possible in order to allow a replacement for that shift to be sourced. Volunteers may be asked to fill in or swap their normal time for another time to cover a cancellation. FLAC will do everything it can to find cover; however, FLAC volunteers are also encouraged to find substitutions for themselves by others registered with FLAC. Those who are not registered with FLAC as volunteers may not advise in our centres and are not covered under FLAC's insurance to do so either.

## 6.2 VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

- **Recognition**

FLAC recognises that volunteers are at the core of its work and contribute a vast wealth of skills, knowledge and support to the organisation. FLAC will seek to ensure that all FLAC volunteers are supported in the most professional way possible.

FLAC Volunteer contributions will be highlighted by FLAC wherever possible. Other supports that recognise our volunteers are listed below.

- *Induction*

See previous section on Recruitment and induction.

- *Information packs*

See previous section on recruitment and induction

### **Specific Support to Centre Volunteers**

- *Training*

FLAC regularly organises training events that support the work of volunteers in the centres.

During the training courses FLAC aims to cover 2 legal topics that frequently come up in the centres. Often an external agency/ organisation is invited to briefly introduce their work to volunteers so that volunteers can refer callers to them with confidence. Training courses provided for FLAC volunteers are free of charge to them. FLAC's training events will usually attract CPD points under the Law Society and Bar Council's Continuing Professional Development schemes. Most take place in Dublin with some training also provided in Cork and there is the possibility of training elsewhere as well, subject to resources.

- *Resource packs*

The interview rooms at Centres should contain two FLAC Resources Folders (Volumes I and II) containing information leaflets that may assist with common legal queries. These lever arch folders have useful information in them.

The contents of the volunteer's own Information Pack and of the Resource Packs correlate, so once volunteers are familiar with the leaflets in their own Information pack they can usually find the necessary information in the Resource Packs too. FLAC will replenish the Resource Packs regularly, but volunteers are asked to notify the Volunteer and Centres Manager when the folders need re-stocking.

In most centres, volunteers will also have access to a computer, printing, and the Internet for use by FLAC Volunteers in providing information for callers.

- *Volunteering support*

The Volunteer and Centres Manager is available to support volunteers and to discuss any matters regarding volunteering with FLAC. The Manager regularly visits FLAC centres to seek feedback from volunteers and to discuss matters that may concern them. FLAC acknowledges the importance of the availability of the Volunteer and Centres Manager during the time that volunteers are at the centres and her working hours are adjusted to suit volunteers.

- *Networking opportunities*

FLAC organises a number of training and other educational events. In addition, FLAC volunteers are encouraged to participate in other FLAC events such as its annual lecture. These are further opportunities for volunteers to network and get to know each other.

- *Insurance*

## **Public Liability Insurance**

FLAC Volunteers (and callers) are insured for personal injury under the general public liability policy of insurance of the Citizens Information Board whilst inside Citizens Information Centre premises.

## **Professional Indemnity Insurance**

The Citizens Information Board provides insurance cover for volunteer solicitors and barristers providing consultations to callers at FLAC/ Legal Advice Clinics based in Citizens Information Centres. This cover is provided on the clear understanding that the role of the volunteer advisor is to assist callers 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. No casework is taken on at FLAC/ Legal Advice Centres and no files or notes are kept apart from the data collection forms. Volunteer advisors are unable to act on behalf of callers or write letters on their behalf. Volunteer advisors may, however, assist callers to draw up their own correspondence and advise them as to the best way to draft simple legal documents.

FLAC also has a professional indemnity insurance policy which covers the centres directly rostered by FLAC. These centres are based in Dublin City and Cork City and while they mainly are operated in partnership with the Citizens Information Services, FLAC also operates some centres in partnership with other organisations. Volunteers who provide legal information and advice at these FLAC Centres are qualified to practise as solicitors or barristers in Ireland and they must also adhere to FLAC's Volunteer Policy and Guidelines.

- **FLAC Volunteer Awards**

FLAC started an award scheme in 2012 where volunteers' contribution is acknowledged annually. The Award consists of a mention on FLAC's Roll of Long Service Volunteers, a special golden FLAC lapel pin and a certificate. As well as acknowledging the commitment and support of our volunteers, the awards allow us to celebrate the role of volunteers in the legal profession and in their communities.

To qualify for an 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.

- **Expenses**

FLAC generally does not refund expenses incurred by volunteers. In certain situations, where volunteers are asked to travel beyond the Centre where they usually volunteer at short notice, FLAC may offer to reimburse travelling expenses.

- **Initial Statement to Callers.**

Volunteer advisors are asked to use FLAC's "Initial Statement to Callers". These are placed in the interview rooms on laminated cards and are also to be found on the back of the Data Collection forms that volunteers complete. They assist in managing callers' expectations and are therefore of value to the volunteer and the service provided. Volunteers will read this statement out loud to callers in the centre before they start to explain their enquiries and try



to ensure that the caller understands what the statement means. Where this statement card is not located in the interview room, the Volunteer and Centres Manager should be notified and will arrange for new ones to be delivered. The text of the statement is:

#### **INITIAL STATEMENT TO CALLERS**



This Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC) service is a voluntary one. This is a confidential service. I am a lawyer and I am happy to give you what legal information and advice I can in this session but I won't be taking on a case for you, act or write letters on your behalf or give second opinions. The session will be a maximum of 15 to 20 minutes and, if you need more help at the end of that, I may have to direct you on to the Legal Aid Board or other solicitors or to another service.

Is that understood?

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## **7. GUIDELINES FOR FLAC CENTRE VOLUNTEERS**

FLAC Centre Volunteers are expected to perform their roles in FLAC's free legal advice clinics with professionalism and commitment to FLAC's values and mission. Centre volunteers are also expected to adhere to the following guidelines when fulfilling their volunteer roles.

### **7.1 HOW A SESSION HAPPENS IN THE CENTRES**

The role of Volunteer Advisors is to consult with callers and provide them with a once-off quality legal advice service. Volunteer Advisors will work in conjunction with other FLAC Volunteers (such as volunteer assistants) and the volunteer and paid staff of the Citizens Information Centres.

Volunteer Advisors consult with callers in private interview rooms. Other Volunteer advisors and assistants may be present during the consultation. The caller's permission should first be sought for this. Some callers may prefer to consult with a single advisor. All volunteer advisors and assistants present at the centres must be pre-registered with FLAC.

At the outset of a consultation, Volunteers should introduce themselves, preferably by their first name, and explain the extent and purpose of the advice session by reciting the Initial Statement to Callers (see section 6.2)

As stated in the "Initial Statement to Callers"; no casework can be taken on, and Volunteers cannot act on behalf of callers or write letters on their behalf. Volunteers may, however, assist callers to draft their own correspondence and advise them of the best way to draft simple legal documents.



The Volunteer should advise that they have a limited time for the interview and that if the matter is complex or has a number of issues, the caller may need to return for another consultation and may therefore meet with a different Volunteer Advisor.

When the advisor has heard details of the caller's enquiry, they should explain what options are open to the caller and where they may obtain further assistance, if that is necessary. It is important that advisors advise people who might be eligible for civil legal aid of their right to that support.

Appropriate and useful information can be printed for the caller from the internet or leaflets from the resource Packs can be distributed.

## **7.2 REFERRALS**

As FLAC does not offer a comprehensive legal service in its centres, referrals are a crucially important component of the Volunteers' role. Referrals should be appropriate and accurate. FLAC Volunteers are required to refer callers to the state funded Legal Aid Board Law Centres whenever the caller is or may be eligible for civil legal aid. Details of the civil legal aid service can be found on the back of the data collection form, as well as in the Resource Pack.

The Resource Pack contains a list of agencies and organisations to which callers may be referred, and their contact details. Full contact details and any relevant leaflets available should be given to callers when a referral is made.

There may also be a lot of information available to callers through the general information service of the Citizens Information Centre where most FLAC centres are based.

Volunteers should bear in mind that callers may be frustrated at being referred and should give them as much assistance as possible.

## **7.3 AWARENESS OF POTENTIAL TEST CASES.**

FLAC has the capacity to take on some strategic litigation in-house where that advances its mission and objectives. (See section 2.3 for details). If a Volunteer identifies an issue which might be consistent with FLAC's campaigns and which might be suitable for further consideration by FLAC's legal team, the Volunteer is asked to note it and the caller's contact details on the Data Collection Form. However, no volunteer will be in a position to promise a caller that FLAC will take on their case for them as all investigations have to be in the light of FLAC's litigation objectives and availability of resources. It should also be noted that there can be a delay in the return of data collection forms which can delay the matter coming to the notice of the FLAC legal team.

## 7.4 DATA COLLECTION PROGRAMME

FLAC runs a Data Collection Programme to collect standardised data from its callers. This assists FLAC in its analysis of unmet legal need and informs its research and law reform objectives. Therefore, any information advisors gather is of great importance in FLAC's research and campaigning work.

Volunteer advisors are responsible for collecting data from callers as part of FLAC's Data Collection Programme. This task can be delegated to the Volunteer Assistants.

Volunteers should complete one form for every caller they see, recording the areas of law covered and referrals made. Volunteers should assure callers that the form is anonymous.

At the end of the advice session advisors are asked to put the forms into the labelled envelope provided by FLAC and leave it sealed on the desk of the interview room or the post-tray at the Citizens Information Centre. To ensure effective and timely data collection, the Citizens Information Centres are asked to post the envelope at their earliest convenience to FLAC's office in Dublin.

## 7.5 VOLUNTEER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

- *Understanding of and Commitment to FLAC*

Volunteers must have an understanding of and commitment to the mission and values of FLAC.

- *Communication*

Volunteers are requested to stay in touch with the FLAC office, and advise us of any relevant matters arising in relation to the running of the Centres, including comments or complaints received from callers.

In particular, volunteers must notify us of any matter involving their safety or security or the safety and security of callers.

Any ideas or suggestions from Volunteers for developing and improving the service are also greatly appreciated.

- *Reliability and Punctuality*

It is crucially important that volunteers notify us as promptly as possible if they cannot attend a Centre as scheduled. Volunteers are asked to make reasonable efforts to liaise with their fellow FLAC registered volunteers to organise a replacement or swap.

If a Volunteer has to cancel at late notice, such as on the day of their scheduled attendance, they must contact the Volunteer and Centres Manager by phone as soon as possible

- *Respect and Tolerance*

Volunteers must be non-judgemental, courteous and supportive towards all callers of the service.

- *Confidentiality and Professional Standards*

Volunteers have a responsibility to uphold the professionalism and strict ethical standards of a legal professional.

The usual high standards of confidentiality which pertain to legal professional practice apply to the work of the Centres.

Volunteers may not advise in FLAC centres unless they are in good standing with their professional body and must be capable of being fully licensed to practise at the time that they are volunteering. Advisors must notify the Volunteer and Centres manager if they are or have been the subject of any disciplinary proceedings by their professional body.

- *Conflicts of Interest*

If a Volunteer perceives a possible personal conflict of interest between themselves and the caller, this should be fully disclosed to the caller and give the caller the opportunity to see another advisor at the Centre, if possible.

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

- *Professional Development and Awareness of Services Available*

Volunteers must stay up to date on relevant areas of law and legal and social services to which callers may be referred. Volunteers should contact the FLAC office if they have any suggestions for additional training or resources which would assist them.

- *Complaints*

FLAC is committed to providing a high quality service to those who need it. However, sometimes people may feel that the service they have received from us, or tried to receive from us, 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, callers to FLAC centres as well. FLAC does not respond to anonymous complaints. If a complaint is made against a Centre volunteer in a FLAC managed centre, it will be passed on to the Volunteer and Centres Manager who will notify the volunteer of the complaint and will ask them for their comments on the complaint. If the complaint is made against a Centre volunteer in a centre which is not managed by FLAC it will go to the CIC staff who similarly will notify the volunteer of the complaint and will ask for their comments on it. Volunteers are encouraged to give their comments as soon as requested with a view to resolving the complaint as fairly and quickly as possible.

## **7.6 WORKING WITH THE CITIZENS INFORMATION CENTRES (CIC)**

If a CIC Information Officer, volunteer or other member of staff is present to assist in the running of the Centre, FLAC Volunteers must work in co-operation with the CIC personnel and consult with them in relation to information or facilities required.

## **7.7 CALLER SATISFACTION SURVEYS**

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

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

## **7.8 DISENGAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS**

- *Unsatisfactory Performance*

If FLAC's Volunteer and Centres Manager feels that a Volunteer is not able to fulfil their duties adequately, the Volunteer's position or working environment may be changed and in appropriate cases, the volunteer may be asked not to volunteer further.

- *Resignation*

Due to changing circumstances Volunteers will need to resign from their volunteer involvement from time to time. FLAC asks all Volunteers to give as much notice as possible to the Volunteer and Centres Manager before resigning. Resigning volunteers may be asked to fill in an online exit survey.

Volunteers who are resigning are encouraged to give feedback regarding their experience to FLAC in order to improve the service provided and the management of volunteers. In particular, if a Volunteer is leaving due to dissatisfaction with their volunteering experience with FLAC, then it would be appreciated if they notified the Volunteer and Centres Manager as to their reasons.

## **8. CHALLENGES IN VOLUNTEERING**

### **8.1 VOLUNTEERS' RESPONSIBILITY FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY**

FLAC is committed to providing a safe workplace for all volunteers. However, volunteers must be aware that FLAC centres are held in premises which are not controlled by FLAC. Volunteers are obliged to accept personal responsibility to work safely, using common sense and foresight. Volunteers should acquaint themselves with the fire escape route applicable to their Centre, and the location of the Centre's fire extinguisher(s).

Volunteers should never be present in a FLAC Centre alone without another person who is either a FLAC volunteer or is a staff or volunteer of the Citizens' Information Centre or other community facility housing the FLAC centre being present.

Any incident involving an accident or injury or any perceived safety risk should be reported to the person in charge of the premises and also, for information, to the Volunteer and Centres Manager. Volunteers should also obey all health and safety instructions provided by the manager of the Centre premises.

### **8.2 DEALING WITH CALLERS**

When dealing with callers to the Centres, volunteers should adhere to the following principles:

- provide clear and consistent information about the services offered by FLAC in the early stages of the consultation by using the “Initial Statement to Callers”
- provide firm, clear and consistent legal information and advice
- demonstrate a courteous, non-judgemental and supportive attitude
- treat the caller with dignity and respect
- never argue with the caller

### **8.3 PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR**

Many Volunteers will already have experience in dealing with difficult callers from their own careers in legal practice.

Occasionally, callers to the Centres may present as angry, frustrated, agitated or drug or alcohol affected.

For FLAC, the safety and welfare of Volunteers and other staff of the Centres is the first priority.

Volunteers should not deal with a caller who is threatening, abusive or alcohol or drug affected. Volunteers should remain calm, listen to the caller, and then explain that they should meet at another, subsequent FLAC clinic, terminate the consultation and seek help from another member of staff if necessary.

The Volunteer should take time out, and if possible discuss the incident with another member of staff to “debrief”.

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

Any incident involving a difficult caller must be reported to the person in charge of the premises and the Volunteer and Centres Manager should also be informed.

### **8.4 OPENING HOURS**

Although the workload at Centres will vary considerably from week to week, the opening hours of the Centre must be adhered to.

At the drop- in centres in particular, the number of callers will vary from week to week. Occasionally there will be not enough volunteers to deal with the numbers who attend. In that situation, some callers may be asked to return to the Centre on a subsequent week, or referred to another Centre.

Volunteers must work together with their fellow volunteers and the CIC staff to ensure that excessive numbers of callers are dealt with appropriately, so that closing times can be met during busy times.

## **8.5 INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR AND COMPLAINTS**

All Volunteers are expected to act in a responsible, respectful manner at all times, in order to ensure a positive and safe working environment in the Centres.

If any Volunteer behaves in a manner that is dangerous, harmful, contrary to FLAC's values or otherwise inappropriately, then their volunteer involvement with FLAC may be terminated.

Please see s.7.4 for FLAC's guidelines for Volunteer responsibilities.

## **8.6 HARASSMENT POLICY**

FLAC will not tolerate harassment of any kind to its volunteers. Any complaints of harassment (including sexual harassment) should be brought to the Volunteer and Centres Manager as soon as possible. All such complaints will be treated with confidentiality.

## **9. CONTACT DETAILS**

Volunteer and Centres Manager

Free Legal Advice Centres

13 Lower Dorset Street, Dublin 1

Tel: 01 887 3600

Mobile: 087 243 8716

[volunteers@flac.ie](mailto:volunteers@flac.ie)