

RIGHTS WITHIN REACH

Developing Effective Legal Advice Outreach Services for Young People



1. Introduction

I was feeling suicidal. If I hadn't got advice I would be dead now.

Young person aged 20

Young people facing problems like homelessness, financial difficulties and the transition to independence need to know what their rights are, what support they can access and the implications of any choices they make. Access to good legal advice can change their lives. Youth Access has extensively demonstrated¹ the **unique legal advice needs** of young people; the failure of the mainstream advice system to meet those needs; the wider consequences of that failure; and the positive outcomes which can be achieved if they are met.

Law Centres and Youth Access members have pioneered projects across the UK that are delivering high quality rights-based legal advice to young people and in doing so are achieving extremely **successful outcomes** for young people and dramatically changing lives for the better. Learning from these successful projects – many of which follow the 'Youth Access Law Centre' model developed jointly by Youth Access and the Law Centres Federation to deal with the unmet need – is important in order to inform the development of new services.

This briefing provides an overview of a guide² by Youth Access and the Law Centres Federation that sets out how to most effectively provide specialist legal advice to young people in places that they will access. The guide combines the experience of existing pioneering services and users' perspectives to deliver **practical tips** for those wishing to develop services.

The messages contained in the guide are also highly pertinent to **current policy developments**. In the legal advice sector, there is an increased emphasis on meeting the needs of vulnerable groups through outreach services, for example through new Community Legal Advice Centres and Networks, although the fixed fee system for civil legal aid is having a negative impact on the delivery of casework for young people.

In the youth sector, meanwhile, there are opportunities for Local Authorities to **commission young people's legal advice services** as part of their Information, Advice and Guidance and Targeted Youth Support service offers within the wider framework of new Integrated Youth Support Services arrangements. There are also clear points of convergence with the localised agenda of Local Area Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships, since there is growing evidence that legal advice, when integrated into holistic youth provision, can play a key role in achieving positive outcomes, such as moving young people from being 'NEET' into education, employment and training.³

youth
ACCESS
to information, advice and counselling

¹ A range of reports relating to young people's advice needs are available at: www.youthaccess.org.uk/publications

² To access the full guide, Rights within Reach: developing effective legal advice outreach services for young people, Verma, P. and Wilkins, M. (2009) go to www.youthaccess.org.uk/publications/upload/outreachadvice.pdf or www.lawcentres.org.uk/publications

³ 'NEET' is a term used by the government to classify young people who are 'Not currently engaged in employment, education or training'

2. Key Findings

This is the best thing we've done as a service – the feedback from young people has been very positive. We were never able to get young people housed before we had the legal advice service.... the legal advice provides the solution.

Connexions Personal Adviser

2.1 Partnerships & Settings

- Getting partnerships right between mainstream and youth advice agencies is crucial in developing successful, well resourced and innovative services to meet the needs of young people.
- The key elements of successful partnership working are that partners are committed and the work embedded across the organisations; key staff identified, supported and trained; and services planned on the basis of identified need.
- Youth Information Advice and Counselling Services were identified by Law Centres and other mainstream advice agencies as the most successful locations for legal advice outreach sessions, though it is worth noting that several successful outreach services are also currently being delivered in other youth settings.
- Outreach services encourage a shared vision which improves the range and quality of advice for young people; they allow cross fertilisation of ideas and good practice; and build the capacity of both mainstream and youth advice agencies.

2.2 Delivering the Service

- Services must be delivered face to face by advisers skilled in working with young people and in environments where young people are comfortable and confident, ideally where they go already for other support.
- Services work best where youth agency staff can offer holistic advice and support to young people, with the legal adviser concentrating on the legal remedies available.
- Services need to be flexible to maximise accessibility. This may involve legal advisers being prepared to attend the outreach venue urgently outside fixed session times and employing innovative approaches, such as texting clients to remind them of appointments.
- A positive initial experience for young people is key. A successfully established adviser-young person relationship is far more likely to allow effective follow up work.

2.3 Staffing and training

- Legal advisers need a particular combination of skills: the ability to engage with young people coupled with sound legal knowledge around young people's specific rights and entitlements.
- High quality induction and training for staff enables upskilling of staff from both agencies.
- Legal advisers may need training on child protection, whilst youth agency staff can be trained by the legal advisers in young people's legal rights, and how and when to refer a case.

2.4 Funding & Resources

- Funding is a major challenge for all those seeking to provide outreach legal advice services to young people. Agencies spend a significant amount of time securing funding, but policy developments in both the legal advice and youth sectors mean that uncertainty is the norm for most. The most secure projects have funding from diverse and complementary government and charity trust funding streams.
- Legal advisers sometimes have to support young people to access other services, such as mental health services. This is only viable if the mainstream advice agency has sufficient non-Legal Services Commission funding to allow staff capacity to deal with any 'non-legal' aspects of the case.
- Long-term sustainability of outreach advice services requires a more joined-up funding approach – involving coordination of local and national government funding from the Legal Services Commission, Department for Children, Schools and Families, and Local Authority Children's Trusts, homelessness and advice budgets.

2.5 User participation, monitoring & evaluation

- Many successful projects have involved young people in planning and shaping services from the outset. Some closely involve young people in the delivery and management of services, including recruitment of staff, monitoring and evaluation.
- Monitoring and evaluation systems need to reflect the varied demands of funders, capturing 'soft' person-centred outcomes as well as 'hard' advice outcomes, but must not be too burdensome on young people.
- The service itself should be kept under regular review by the agencies involved and by young people using the service.

3. The Research

We have achieved some excellent outcomes for young people who may not have accessed us via the main Law Centre.

Law Centre Case Worker

The study used:

- **Desk research** into published evidence and policy on the subject of legal advice and young people's outreach services in order to identify issues to be explored further in the study.
- In-depth **telephone interviews**, in order to obtain qualitative data, with:
 - six mainstream legal advice agencies providing outreach services in youth settings (4 Law Centres, 1 Citizens Advice Bureau and 1 private practice solicitors firm); and eight youth advice agencies hosting outreach services.
- Three **focus groups** with young people to test the findings.



Top Tips for setting up a legal advice outreach service for young people

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1 Analyse need

Legal advisers: check your user stats – how many young people does your service currently see? Consult with young people, talk to staff from other youth agencies – ask them if they think a legal advice service is needed.

2 Find partners

Look for organisations who will share a vision of meeting the need. Specialist advice agencies should look for an organisation with the capacity to provide wider support to young people on their non-legal needs. Youth agencies should look for a legal advice agency prepared to be flexible about delivery methods.

3 Get the right space

Site the outreach session in an accessible location, with good transport links and facilities for disabled people and those with young children. Make sure it is a space that young people know and trust with a friendly reception and things for young people to do while they wait to see an adviser.

4 Involve young people

Ask young people's views throughout the development and delivery of the service and involve them in shaping and managing the service.

5 Establish a steering group

Establish a steering group involving young people and representatives from both organisations, the local authority Children's Trust, and other relevant statutory and voluntary agencies.

6 Train your staff

Ensure legal staff receive training on Child Protection and working with young people, and youth agency staff receive training on legal rights and how and when to refer cases. All staff need to be friendly, compassionate, informal, flexible, professional, and treat young people with respect.

7 Maximise use of resources

Have a clear division of labour – with legal advisers covering casework and youth agency staff providing general advice and support.

8 Adopt flexible but robust systems

Be flexible in how you deliver the service, adapting to young people's needs, but have robust recording and monitoring systems.

9 Set up referrals for holistic support

Ensure all staff are aware of where and how to refer young people for additional support, e.g. drug and alcohol, sexual health, parenting services and counselling, if this is not provided by the host agency.

10 Obtain diverse funding!

Easier said than done, but aim for a combination of Legal Services Commission funding for the direct specialist casework element and local authority or charitable trust funding for generalist advice and support and project development.

About Youth Access

Youth Access is the national membership organisation for a network of 200 youth information, advice and counselling services.

Through its members, Youth Access is one of the largest providers of youth advice and counselling services in the UK, dealing with over 1 million enquiries a year on issues as diverse as sexual health, mental health, relationships, homelessness, benefits and debt.

Youth Access provides the training, resources, research, campaigning and other infrastructure support to ensure high quality services exist to meet young people's diverse needs.

For more information about Youth Access, including a national directory of youth information, advice and counselling services, go to www.youthaccess.org.uk.

About The Law Centres Federation

The Law Centres Federation is the voice of Law Centres®, which provide free independent legal advice and representation to the most disadvantaged members of society. Law Centres provide help in solving everyday problems, such as getting decent housing, dealing with discrimination, or obtaining the correct benefits. The LCF believes that every community should have a Law Centre and calls for a national network of independent Law Centres to stand up for people's fundamental and human rights.

The **Young People's Project** is developing a Pan-London strategy to provide good quality legal advice to every young Londoner who needs it. We support Law Centres to set up and develop young people's legal advice projects. We have facilitated a Youth Homelessness Legal Advice Project across 24 boroughs and a Pan-London Education Advice Project led by Law Centres and delivered in partnership with local youth agencies. We work closely with Youth Access to get young people's legal advice on the agenda of policy makers and funders. We jointly convene the London Youth Advice Forum, a network of Law Centres and Youth Information and Advice Centres working across London to increase young people's access to legal advice.

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