



Whittlesea Community Connections - Legal intake Case Study

The client contacted our contact centre seeking assistance with outstanding fines exceeding \$20,000.

At the time of contact, the earliest available legal appointment was several weeks away due to service demand. The client expressed significant distress, stating that they needed assistance immediately, and made suicidal statements during the phone call.

Recognising the client's immediate needs, the legal intake officer completed a suicide risk assessment and offered information about available mental health support services. In addition, the legal intake officer arranged the earliest available appointment with our service and provided details of external legal services that may have been able to provide more immediate assistance.

The call concluded with the client accepting an appointment with our service and advising that they would also follow up with the external referral.

The following day, the client attended our duty room in person. They appeared visibly distressed and agitated. The same legal intake officer met with the client and completed an in-person assessment. During this conversation, the client disclosed additional information about their circumstances, including that they were experiencing homelessness, had low literacy, and were living with mental health challenges. They were carrying several forms and contact numbers that had been provided to them but did not understand their purpose.

The legal intake officer reviewed the documents and identified that they were applications for social and community housing. The legal intake officer explained their purpose and discussed services that could assist the client in completing the forms. As it was close to 5pm, the legal intake officer also provided the crisis housing hotline and information about other housing support services that could assist.

The contact numbers the client had been given when he presented to the appointment appeared to have been provided by another service included legal and mental health support services. The client did not understand what these services were for so the legal intake officer explained that they offered confidential support from trained mental health professionals. The client stated that they preferred to speak only to God about their mental health. The legal intake officer acknowledged this preference while encouraging the client to keep the contact details should they ever wish to speak with someone in the future. By the end of the conversation the client appeared more receptive to the idea of accessing these supports if needed.

The legal intake officer advocated on the client's behalf enabling the legal service to prioritise their appointment. The client also requested that the legal intake officer be present during the legal appointment explaining that they had developed trust and felt comfortable with their support.

A couple of days later the client returned with positive news. An external legal service had agreed to provide ongoing casework and assistance with the client's outstanding fines,



meaning they no longer required representation from our service. The client also reported feeling in a better state of mind.

This case highlights the importance of effective intake and triage particularly the value of conducting assessments in person rather than solely over the phone. Meeting the client face-to-face provided a more complete understanding of their circumstances and enabled the identification of additional needs beyond the presenting legal issue.

Although our service was unable to provide immediate casework due to service demand the legal intake officer ensured the client's immediate safety needs were addressed, completed appropriate risk assessment and triage, connected the client with relevant housing, mental health, and legal support services, and facilitated access to a legal service that was able to provide timely representation.

The case also demonstrates the importance of an integrated practice model that adopts a holistic approach to client support. By addressing the client's legal issue alongside their housing, literacy, and mental health needs, the legal intake officer was able to provide appropriate referrals, advocate for timely legal assistance, and support the client in accessing the services best placed to meet their broader needs.