

Family Court Support Service

Volunteer profile

Excellent people skills, ability to put people at their ease. Our clients are often vulnerable individuals and they are going through a very stressful experience. You may have to deal with distressed clients, assist people who have learning difficulties, or communicate via an interpreter. Patience is essential!

Non judgemental attitude. Our service is free to all, regardless of their background, past mistakes, etc. You may be asked to assist an ex-offender, someone who swears constantly, a homeless person. All are treated equally.

Tact and discretion. Everything regarding our clients must be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Calm and unflappable disposition. Emotions can run high and tempers fray, particularly at court. You will need to keep the client as calm as possible. You may also be party to distressing stories in some cases.

Ability to think on your feet. The court process frequently takes an unexpected turn, as do the human beings involved.

No prior experience of law is required but an observant and curious attitude is essential. Be willing to ask questions whenever you can, to further your knowledge.

Time commitment is very variable – some volunteers attend several times a week, others just twice a month. We usually email volunteers a month ahead with a list of hearings requiring cover, and ask which ones they are able to do. Hearings typically involve:

- First court date. Hearing may be listed for half an hour but parties will be required to attend one hour beforehand, and you will need to collect the file from the office and meet the client in good time. So all together possibly 2-3 hours (more if court is running late).
- Subsequent court dates. Could be any time, any day. There may be one or many further hearings. Depending on issues in the case, hearings vary from half an hour to all day. Ideally the same volunteer will be available to assist a client throughout the process, but in practice we understand that this may not be possible.
- Court Desks. This is where we have volunteers on hand at the court to assist parties who have arrived for their first hearings without having sought advice or representation in advance. Usually Mondays, this is a 9am start and we may pick up between 0 and 6 clients – so it is best to set the day aside, but you may not be required for the whole time.
- Writing up an attendance note for the file after each client meeting/court appearance.