

A Framework for Supporting Community Justice Help

This framework is proposed in *Community Justice Help: Advancing Community-Based Access to Justice, A discussion paper* (Julie Mathews and David Wiseman). Please consult the full paper for greater detail. <https://cleoconnect.ca/cleo-research/learn-about-community-justice-help/>.



The purpose of the framework is to recognize and support community justice help to increase access to justice for people who have low incomes or face other social disadvantages. It is based on existing good practices in Ontario's not-for-profit, community-based sector, and includes three key features of good quality community justice help and markers for each feature.

"Community justice help" refers to the work that community workers (staff and volunteers) undertake to help people with life-affecting problems with a legal element.

Three features of good quality community justice help



Three features of good quality community justice help

1. **Community justice helpers have the knowledge, skills and experience they need** to assist people with the legal elements of their problems and to navigate relevant legal processes.
2. **Community justice helpers work within a not-for-profit organization and an ethical infrastructure** that protects the dignity, privacy and consumer welfare of the people they are assisting.
3. **Community justice helpers provide support that responds to their clients' needs in a holistic way**, based on an understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of their needs, the social context of their lives, and the availability of other appropriate services in the community. In a nutshell, community justice helpers know their clients and know their communities inside out:
 - They recognize that needs can be multi-dimensional (e.g. psychological, economic, social, legal) and that multiple dimensions may need to be addressed at the same time;
 - They respond to clients' needs, based on an understanding of the particular social context (e.g. socio-economic status, racialization, communication barriers) in which the needs arise and how that context must be taken into account in providing assistance; and
 - Their responses are informed by knowledge of the service community and what other sources of appropriate support, including licensed legal service providers, are available.

Markers for the features of good quality community justice help

Feature 1: Community justice helpers have the knowledge, skills and experience they need

Knowledge,
Skills & Experience

- 1.1 The organization and its staff are specialists in providing help and performing tasks related to their clients' particular problems (e.g. settlement, housing insecurity, intimate partner violence, family breakdown); they provide this help and carry out these tasks routinely.
- 1.2 Staff have comprehensive, up-to-date knowledge and skills.
- 1.3 Staff participate in appropriate training or other learning opportunities regularly, or as needed, to update and enhance their knowledge and skills.
- 1.4 The organization has ongoing relationships with community legal clinics or other appropriate licensed legal service providers whom they consult as needed.
- 1.5 Staff are well supported within their organization, are connected to external peers and mentors, and receive appropriate oversight.
- 1.6 Staff help people with forms or other tasks that many people would expect to be able to do on their own, or with some assistance, but without the help and expense of hiring a licensed legal service provider. Examples of such tasks include those that governments and government-supported legal aid services have categorized as "do-it-yourself," such as fillable forms, often with associated guides and templates.



Feature 2: Community justice helpers work within a not-for-profit organization and ethical infrastructure

Not-for-Profit
Organization &
Ethical Infrastructure

- 2.1 The organization's staff receive a salary but do not accrue any direct payment from clients for providing community justice help (i.e. there is no risk of over-charging, or other financial abuse or fraud that may exist in for-profit services).
- 2.2 The organization has accountability structures in place, usually overseen by a board of directors, to ensure that the organization is operating according to its policies (e.g. staff supervision and performance evaluation).
- 2.3 The organization has policies in place (e.g. client confidentiality, code of conduct) and well-established practices on ethical issues to guide the organization and the delivery of services.
- 2.4 The organization has a complaints policy that is accessible to clients, and clients' complaints are responded to appropriately and in a timely way.
- 2.5 The organization has a liability insurance policy in place that provides for compensation to clients in the event of negligence or error by a staff member.



Feature 3: Community justice helpers provide holistic support

Holistic Support

- 3.1 The organization typically offers holistic support that is informed by an awareness of the following types of factors:
- The multi-dimensional nature of problems;
 - The social context of clients' lives;
 - The levels and types of specialization or expertise required for various aspects of problems;
 - The need for and availability of targeted, timely and joined-up services;
 - The barriers to accessing other potential providers of assistance in the community, including licensed legal service providers; and
 - The follow-up and longer-term support available from the organization or from others.
- 3.2 The organization frequently assists with law-related needs that are unmet or underserved by licensed legal service providers in the community.
- 3.3 The organization offers help that connects to and supports good quality legal services¹ from local licensed legal service providers, where such services are available and accessible to people in the community.

¹ Good quality legal services encompass the following elements: relevant and sufficient experience in the particular area of law; adequate understanding of the person's social context and the potential need for holistic supports; geographic proximity; and provision of services in a language that the person understands or can confidently access with an interpreter's help. Examples of accessible legal services are those available through a community legal clinic, a legal aid program, a pro bono program, or other affordable law-related program.

Use of the markers

- ✓ The markers can be used as a guide or checklist, and are intentionally generic to support the full spectrum of community justice help offered by organizations.
- ✗ The markers are not exhaustive and are not intended to impose a rigid structure or new regulations on community justice help.

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