

Lawyers Fostering Independence

Prevention is 9/10th of the Law: Helping Youth Avoid and Overcome Legal Barriers



Presented by
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Who We Serve:

LFI provides civil legal assistance to youth and young adults (17y-25y) who either have lived experience in out of home care and/or have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, homelessness.

We currently have active programs in King and Snohomish Counties, with Pierce Co. coming online this spring.

What We Do:

- *Pro Bono* Representation
- Drop-In Legal Clinics
- Know-Your-Rights Presentations
- Provider Trainings



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Today's Goal: to help professionals working with at-risk and systems involved youth identify potential legal issues, even before they occur, and to provide guidance on when to seek legal assistance.

Topics:

#1 – Housing Disputes

#2 – Credit & Debt Issues

#3 – Interacting with Law Enforcement



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Topics #1 and #2 - Issue Spotting

- Can you identify at least three points where Maria could have benefitted from earlier assistance and/or intervention by a service provider and/or attorney?
- What preventative measures (or mitigating steps) could be taken at each of these points?
- At which point(s) should Maria and/or her case manager contact an attorney?



#1 – Housing Disputes

Scenario: Maria had been living in an apartment with a roommate for the past year. When they moved in, they noticed that there were a couple tiles missing in the bathroom and a stain on the living room carpet, but it wasn't very noticeable, so it didn't bother either of them. They both signed a 12-month lease, but ended up staying an extra couple of months after their lease ended. After that, they both decided to move to different apartments, so Maria called their landlord and told him they wanted to move out at the end of the month.

Two weeks after she moved out, Maria received a letter and bill from the landlord stating that she owed \$2,450, including an additional month's rent, replacement of the missing bathroom tiles, full carpet replacement, and replacing the closet door in her roommate's bedroom, which apparently had been broken when her roommate moved out.



#2 – Credit & Debt Issues

Scenario: Maria had to breach (not honor) the terms of her apartment lease – she moved out without paying a month's rent. The landlord sent Maria a bill for the rent and some other fees associated with her moving out. Maria couldn't pay, so she ignored the bill.

Months later, a debt collector that bought Maria's housing debt from the landlord started sending Maria nasty letters and leaving mean phone calls about the debt.



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Topic #3 – Questions to Consider

- Is Maria in trouble?
- What proactive steps can Maria take after this incident?
- What resources are available to Maria to help?



#3 – Interacting with Law Enforcement

Scenario: Maria, who is 19 years old, was stopped by the police while she was walking down the street, minding her own business. Maria was walking home from a friend's house where she had had a little bit of beer earlier, but she was not visibly intoxicated.

The police officer asked Maria for her name and ID, which she gave. He then asked Maria if he could search her backpack. Not wanting to appear confrontational, Maria said yes. The officer found a can of beer in her bag, along with some books and her wallet. The officer told Maria she would be getting something in the mail about the incident.



Summary

- Most legal problems can be prevented and/or mitigated before they become truly “legal” in nature.
- Empowering youth to know their legal rights *and* legal responsibilities is the key to prevention.
- Case managers and service providers can help young people prevent legal issues from escalating by knowing when and how to connect the youth with legal help.



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