

SOCIAL SERVICE EXPERT NEWS

Committee for Public
Counsel Services

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Staffing Update

As many of you may know, we said good-bye to Annabelle Frasier, Director of Social Service Advocacy for the Mental Health Litigation Division, this summer. Annabelle brought a thoughtful and insightful voice to our team and the vendors she supported. While we will miss her, we are excited to announce that on October 11, 2022, Olivia Dubois, LCSW, filled the position vacated by Annabelle. Olivia has her Bachelor's in Psychology and is a Master of Social Work. She graduated from Boston College School of Social Work where she currently teaches Systems of Oppression and Health and Mental Health Policy. She has worked in the Roxbury Defenders Office as a Social Service Advocate since 2015. Olivia then went on to manage the SSAs in the Northeast Region for the Public Defender Division in 2021. Olivia is a current participant of the City of Boston's Mental Health Crisis Response Design Group where she works with other Boston community members to design a non-police community-led crisis response.



WELCOME OLIVIA



Getting Started on a Case

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What you need when
starting a case:

- The ENTIRE APPROVED Motion for Funds.
- The NAC #.
- Letter of Engagement that specifies scope of requested work and services, and your role.
- Client contact information.
- Signed releases-remember do not contact anyone without permission from the attorney.
- The context/theory/criminal charges of the case.
- Timeline for any work product.

Boundaries within in Legal Framework
Why We need Them and Why We Love Them

The role of a Social Work/Social Service Expert vendor requires knowing and understanding your professional and personal boundaries, and how those fit within the legal framework. As independent contractors, creating and maintaining professional boundaries are an essential component of ethical and professional practice; being clear and explicit with clients and attorneys about these will minimize the chance of a boundary violation, which can have a negative impact on their legal defense.

Our involvement with any client as an expert vendor is limited to the services necessary for their legal matter, and to the duration of the case or billable amount in the approved motion for funds. Our role in aiding the client to develop their own resources and network of support can be an important part of successful litigation and is often a clinical and life goal for our clients. For example, who does the client contact in the community for psychiatric or relapse prevention support, for transportation needs, etc.? Remember that many of our clients come from non-responsive environments, and you are likely one of the few people who do respond to their needs. This, of course, can create many boundary pushing situations, so from the beginning, we recommend that vendors have a clear and direct discussions with clients and attorneys about their role, scope of services to be provided, and the time-limited nature of the relationship.

Helpful Hints for Independent Contractors:

- **Privileged Communication**

- Attorneys and clients enjoy privileged communication.

- **Hours and Availability**

- You decide your working hours and when you are available for communication with the client and the attorney.
- You want to know the best ways and times that work for them.
- Do you or the attorney respond after hours?
- How often does the attorney want you to provide updates on your work on the case?
- What are the best ways of communicating with you, the attorney, and the client, e.g., phone calls, text messages, emails, mail, etc.?

- **Scope of Practice**

It's important to know the services you can and cannot provide. Consider these questions:

- What is the scope of the work you are being asked to complete and do you have the experience and training to do it?
- What is the time frame of the requested service(s)? *This can be a moving target as some cases resolve quickly, while others can last for years.*

- Would you transport the client, and under what conditions (this is not required of vendors, and you cannot be hired specifically for transportation)?
- Would you accompany the client to meetings or service visits? Even if you do not transport the client, you may still need to attend meetings or service visits.
- How would you respond to requests to provide services beyond those you've agreed to?

- **Emergencies**

While it is rare, there are times that our clients will have emergencies. Setting clear expectations as to what the client can, and cannot, expect from you and identifying the client's resources for safety planning should be part of initial conversations. Planning with the client and attorney in advance of a crisis will also help you avoid boundary violations, such as inadvertent disclosure of confidential information, accidentally becoming a witness in the case, being put into a situation that creates an ethical conflict or raising professional liability issues. Consider these questions, in the context of the client's needs and case as you discuss safety planning:

- What you, the attorney, and the client should do in an emergency or a crisis.
- While there is no expectation that SSEs will be available 24/7 or are on-call clinicians, we do know there are times when our clients are in crisis.
- What constitutes an emergency or crisis for this client?
- Who should the client contact if they are in a crisis?
- What is your role, if any, in the event of a crisis? Will you talk with them on the phone? For what purpose? Will you help the client access emergency services by providing information and phone numbers? What should you do if you are seriously concerned?
- Have you discussed with the attorney the issues on the limits of confidentiality and attorney-client privilege? Are you in agreement about what you can share in case of an emergency?
- What support can the attorney be expected to provide in the event of an emergency?
- What supports and resources are available to the client to prevent a crisis from arising?
- If you need to withdraw, let the attorney know as soon as possible. You can direct the hiring attorney to the Director of Private Social Work Services for the division.

Now that we have reviewed the importance of boundaries in professional work, we want to remind you that boundaries help us personally. Good boundaries can provide a good defense against burn out, secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and they help celebrate work-life balance.

Let Us Know If You Have Become an “Expert”

Since you first filled out the vendor information form you may have new licensing, certifications, or training that you want to add to your profile. You may have been qualified as an expert in a particular area by the courts and we want to know

Please email ssvendors@publiccounsel.net with any new profile information!

SSE Successes in Mental Health Litigation

An attorney specializing in mental health litigation, specifically working with people facing civil commitments, hires SSEs regularly. Her practice has been truly transformed as a result of the work that SSEs do!

In civil commitments, the goal of the legal team is to find a less restrictive alternative for their client. The SSE's role is to work with the attorney and the client to find community-based treatment and support, based on the clients' expressed interests, needs, and wants. In this attorney's practice, she notes "I have used SSEs on multiple occasions which have directly led to the discharge of my clients."

SSEs have often been the sole reason why a client is returned to the community, where they can be supported by loved ones and community providers. This attorney notes "I have had a judge discharge a client based on the client having medical appointments set up and a place to go in the community. The SSE was able to find the providers, make the appointment, and speak with friends, verify housing, and testify in court." In this case, without the discharge planning and testimony of the SSE, the outcome would have been very different.

SSEs also provide other case management services including "obtaining birth certificates and MassHealth." Case management services can be complicated, SSEs have prevailed in obtaining medical appointments for clients without insurance and obtaining insurance for clients who are from out of state. This attorney has witnessed the persistence of SSE's and that their advocacy has led to big wins for the clients!

Housing is an ever-present challenge for our clients across the state. For this attorney, SSEs have been miracle workers: in one case they "helped a client get on a housing lottery and the client was chosen" and successfully obtained independent, dignified housing.

SSEs collaborate with their clients to develop relapse prevention plans. The attorney on this case notes that these plans "helped the client have more insight into his challenges and he was better able to speak with his providers about how he would stay safe in the community." Not only did this improve the client's ability to advocate for themselves—it also resulted in a successful discharge from the hospital.

Discharging planning is a key component to SSE work on mental health civil commitment cases. For one client and their legal team, the battle was uphill, and very steep. The client was hospitalized for five years and held on a bail in Superior Court. When the SSE got involved, they worked tirelessly to develop a discharge plan that would appease both the Superior Court and the hospital. The attorney reports "When the Superior Court reviewed the discharge plan and saw the SSE in court, the judge lowered the bail to personal recognizance which paved the way for my client's discharge from the hospital." This would NEVER be possible without the SSE as part of the legal team!

We continue to hear from attorneys, judges, and clients how SSEs are not only changing the lives of their clients, but also transforming the legal practice. Continue to share these amazing, life-changing stories and keep up the hard, but necessary work. And thank you!

What are Attorneys Saying?

"I've been using [an SSE]. She's fantastic. She's in continuous contact with the locked-up clients and me. She's really diligent, and so patient with the clients. She's really on top of things!"

"I have utilized [SSE] and she was also wonderful to work with."

"I have spent the last several months finding and working with some fantastic professionals."

"[SSE]...Excellent."

"[SSE] was so knowledgeable...he was easy to talk to [about the case]."

EXTRA! EXTRA!

Check out the vendor webpage!

<https://www.publiccounsel.net/soc/>

Make sure to spend some time exploring the CPCS website where you can find links and resources to helpful information.

<https://www.publiccounsel.net/>

Trainings, Conferences & Certifications

Please check out the CPCS training page for upcoming trainings available to the public:

<https://www.publiccounsel.net/train/events/>

The various schools of Social Work and other graduate programs offer trainings, workshops, and post graduate certificate programs in Trauma, CBT, Human Service Management, and other specialty areas.

NASW Events/workshops/ trainings

https://www.naswma.org/events/event_list.asp?show=&group=&start=3%2F19%2F2020&end=&view=&cid=20886

NASW Mass Chapter Annual Awards Celebration

<https://www.naswma.org/page/Awards2022>

The NASW Massachusetts Chapter is hosting its **49th Annual Awards Celebrations** *virtually* on **Thursday, December 1, 2022**, to celebrate and recognize this year's honoree, as well as their achievements, dedication, and support to our social work community.

William James College:

<https://www.williamjames.edu/academics/continuing-education/listing-of-programs-and-courses.html>

- Problematic Sexual Behaviors Lunch and Learn Series: November 29, 2022. 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM
- The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Mitigating Conflict: Exploring Best Practices for Reaching Points of Shared Understanding in Relationships: December 02, 2022. 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM
- Problematic Sexual Behaviors Lunch and Learn Series: December 13, 2022. 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM
- Clinical Considerations in Working with LGBTQ+ People & Creating Safe Office Spaces for LGBTQ+ Clients: December 16, 2022. 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Charles Hamilton Houston Institute: <https://charleshamiltonhouston.org/>

Boston University Center for Anti-Racism Research: <https://www.bu.edu/antiracism-center/the-center/>

Helpful Resources and Links

HopeWell: Rise (Readiness, Inquiry, Scholarship, Education) Program

<https://hopewellinc.org/education-support/>

The academic opportunity gap for children experiencing foster care is one of the largest gaps for any group of students in Massachusetts. HopeWell has launched an innovative new program, RISE, to address this gap by targeting early literacy, a critical intervention point that influences a child's future academic success. RISE is an in-home literacy program that supports kindergarten through 3rd grade (some flexibility based on the child) involved in the foster care system.

Rise Above: <https://weriseabove.org/>

Rise Above serves youth and young adults in the care and custody of the Department of Children & Families through funding self-selected enriching activities such as sports, dance, gymnastics, study abroad programs, birthday parties, concert tickets, movie tickets and more!

Friends of Children: Focus Program <https://friendsofchildreninc.org/focus/>

FOCUS is a community-based membership program that connects transition-aged youth to resources, peers, and community members with the goal of success and independence!

One Can Help: <https://onecanhelp.org/>

"We work with court-appointed attorneys and social workers to provide clients at risk with essential resources when no other aid is available, to help them break the cycle of deprivation and hopelessness." Resources available in juvenile court cases (Primarily CAFL & YAD).

National Association of Forensic Counselors: <http://www.forensiccounselor.org/>

The National Board of Forensic Evaluators: <https://www.nbfe.net/>

William James College Continuing Ed/Lifelong Learning:

<https://www.williamjames.edu/academics/lifelong/index.cfm>

Massachusetts General Hospital: Center for Law, Brain & Behavior: <http://clbb.mgh.harvard.edu/>

The Center for Law, Brain & Behavior puts the most accurate and actionable neuroscience in the hands of judges, lawyers, policymakers, and journalists—people who shape the standards and practices of our legal system and affect its impact on people's lives. We work to make the legal system more effective and more just for all those affected by the law. (Past presentations and slides are available for free.)

National Alliance on Mental Illness, Massachusetts: <https://namimass.org/>

Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS):

Helpline: <https://helplinema.org/>

Search for Treatment: https://mahelplineonline.custhelp.com/app/account/opa_interview

Sentencing Project: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/>

Family Resource Centers: <https://www.frcma.org/>

RE-ENTRY SERVICES

Coming Home Directory Greater Boston:

http://www.cominghomedirectory.org/assets/2019/02/CHD_Print_Final_With-cover-2019.pdf

Office of Returning Citizens, Boston: <https://www.boston.gov/departments/returning-citizens>

After Incarceration Support Systems (AISS), Hampden: <http://hcsdma.org/aiss-3/>

Worcester Initiatives for Supported Reentry (WISR):

<https://www.advocates.org/services/worcester-initiative-supported-reentry-wisr>

CPCS is HIRING!

CPCS, the Massachusetts Public Defenders office, is hiring three staff Social Services Advocate positions (one part time located in Brockton, two full time located in Roxbury and Fall River) and one Supervising Social Services Advocate Position located in Boston. Please see below for the position details and share with your networks!

<https://careers-publiccounsel.icims.com/jobs/2246/social-services-advocate-supervisor---pdd/job>

<https://careers-publiccounsel.icims.com/jobs/2280/social-services-advocate---pdd-roxbury-defenders/job>

<https://careers-publiccounsel.icims.com/jobs/2275/social-services-advocate---pdd-brockton/job>

<https://careers-publiccounsel.icims.com/jobs/2274/social-services-advocate---pdd-fall-river-trial-unit/job>

BILLING

While we can help with some billing questions, your best resource for answers is the Vbill User Manual or you can email vendorbills@publiccounsel.net with any questions. That being said, here are a few quick reminders.

- Travel time is billable. The rate is lower than the hourly rate for other services and is prepopulated by VBill.
- Remember if you make a billable phone call during your travel time, you cannot bill for both services.
- Reminder FY2023 is from 7/1/2022-6/30/2023
- Billable hours per FY are capped at 1,650, and you can only bill up to 12 hours/day. Anything over those hours requires a waiver.
- There are timelines for submitting Vbills. Make sure you know what they are.

Don't forget to keep us updated on new licenses, additional certifications, or potential conflicts. If you have not done so already, please update the attached vendor information questionnaire.

Your Social Service Expert Contacts

If you have any questions or need guidance, please contact the person who oversees the Social Services Experts for that division.

Kristin Dame, LMHC
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617-910-5815
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617-910-5753
Youth Advocacy Division

Olivia Dubois, LCSW
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Children and Family Law Division

The Committee for Public Counsel Services

- We Defend the Accused
- We Demand Justice
- We fight for the Rights of Parents and Children