Position Description: Civil Lawyer

The organisation:

First Step Legal (FSL) was established in 2008 as a health justice partnership (HJP) within First Step, a not-for-profit mental health and addiction clinic in St Kilda. It is NAS-accredited and a member of the Federation of Community Legal Centres (FCLC). In recent years, FSL has emerged as sector specialists in closely integrated legal practice, having expanded significantly to also embed lawyers within four external organisations: Windana Therapeutic Community, Alfred Health (St Kilda Road Outpatient Clinic), Better Health Network, and Launch Housing.

FSL's mission is to increase access to justice for particularly vulnerable often marginalised people, by bringing integrated legal help to them, wherever they present for support. It provides pro-bono legal advice, casework and representation to people referred by its parter organisations. It prioritises its casework to focus on clients who are genuinely engaged or wanting to be engaged in treatment, recovery and therapeutic interventions that will support their ongoing wellbeing.

FSL predominately practices in relation to criminal law, family law, family violence, infringements and some other areas of civil law. For family violence matters, we assist both affected family members and perpetrators. Our clients often have several different legal matters so our assistance can range from long-term ongoing case work to discrete advice and warm referrals. We also deliver secondary consultations with our partner practitioners. Given the significant financial disadvantage of our client's, FSL's lawyers routinely collaborate with our in-house financial counsellor to alleviate immediate financial stressors and improve the resolution of social security matters.

FSL currently comprises a small close-knit team including a Director of Legal Services, Partnership Consultant, Principal Lawyer, Senior Criminal Lawyer, Senior Family Lawyer, Generalist Lawyer and Financial Counsellor. Our work with men who use violence is supported by three family violence consultants, and two legal educators. FSL lawyers are administratively supported by a Practice Administrator, Legal Case Manager and up to ten volunteer paralegals who are earning a credit toward their Juris Doctor from the University of Melbourne.

The vision:

Our vision is for a community where everyone can access high-quality, compassionate and empowering legal help. It is important to us to:

- Encourage clients to engage with services that will enhance their personal wellbeing
- Empower clients to make fully informed legal decisions
- Build our client and partners capacity to engage with the justice system
- Achieve legal outcomes aimed at reducing future contact with the justice system
- Recognise that trauma-informed practice is essential to closely integrated legal practice
- Coordinate a convenient, dignified and safe service that priorities human connection
- Participate in a recovery-oriented, continuous model of care

FSL's practice framework is purpose-built to continuously grow the evidence base for closely integrated practice. Our 2024 impact evaluation established that FSL's model improved subjective personal wellbeing by 21%. Significantly, the study has established that closely integrated legal services can reduce acute mental health presentations by 68%, emergency department visits by 30%, the risk of homelessness by 37% and the risk or experience of family violence by 79%.

Funding sources:

FSL receives funding from a variety of sources including philanthropic, corporate, government and quasi-government sources. This includes Community Legal Services Program (CLSP) and National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) funding, Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) funding, and Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner (VLSB+C) funding.

The role in context:

FSL's distinct model is highly relational and delivers legal, therapeutic, and practical help as part of an interdisciplinary team. We are routinely balancing our client's medical treatment with legal deadlines, with our client's agency and instructions prevailing when these conflict. To build continuity, familiarity, trust and knowledge, FSL allocates one dedicated lawyer to each partner organisation. That lawyer acts as the 'face' of the legal practice and links partner staff with other lawyers when specialist assistance is required beyond the dedicated lawyer's expertise. The dedicated lawyer plays a lead role in building legal capability in the partner organisation via secondary consultations and structured capacity building activities.

The incumbent will be leading our housing partnership across two sites in East St Kilda and South Melbourne, serving people in crisis accommodation with co-occurring needs including drug and/or alcohol abuse, family violence, mental ill-health, and financial disadvantage. The incumbent will be able assist clients with their family violence, tenancy, social security, debt and fines issues, inclusive of appearing at VCAT and Magistrates Courts as required. Criminal law issues routinely arise in this service setting, creating an opportunity for the incumbent to utilise

their existing criminal law expertise or be mentored in this area of law by an accredited criminal law specialist.

This long-standing partnership has been reinforced by regular reflective practice involving lawyers, housing and social support workers committed to continuously improving each other's understanding of how-to best work with clients in crisis. The shared goal is to maximise safety, choice, control and predictability for clients. The incumbent will have the ability to decide whether a discrete intervention or ongoing casework will support legal agency for each client served in this nuanced service setting.

Key responsibilities:

Legal service
You will provide high-quality legal advice, representation, and casework, by - • Providing a clear and timely legal service from within a crisis accommodation setting, and with particular focus in civil law including family violence intervention orders, personal safety intervention orders, tenancy, social security, debt, and infringement matters. • Triaging referred clients with civil law issues from every FSL partnership to understand their goals, assess urgency and eligibility, and collaborate on their additional legal and non-legal issues with your legal peers and financial counsellor. • Deciding in consultation with the principal lawyer, whether a discrete piece of advice or ongoing case work will have the most impact for the client given their circumstances. • Mentoring your legal peers and partner practitioners in areas of civil law and in doing so, contributing to the development of practice knowledge in this area of law. • Assisting with FSL's paralegal volunteer program, including supporting training, task allocation, and supervision.
Integrated practice
You will contribute to the delivery of a closely integrated legal practice by – • Collaborating with the client and partner practitioners to agree on the hierarchy of need that informs an integrated plan of action that can be responsive to a client's changing circumstance. • Privileging client choice in the timing and sequencing of interventions, including the legal intervention. • Articulating legal concepts inclusive of consent, confidentiality, and privilege

requirements in plain language, and recording decisions diligently • Facilitating referrals to other members of the FSL team and any relevant agencies as part of an integrated case plan. • Prioritising a consistent presence at your partnership, and contribution to the Steering Committee meetings. • Respecting the expertise of partner practitioners and deferring to them appropriately for case-management and client health related decisions • Building the capability of partner practitioners to identify and respond to legal needs, including providing secondary consultations and delivering bespoke legal education sessions.
Evidence base
You will contribute to building the evidence for closely integrated legal practice, by - • Accurately entering all client-based activities in Actionstep, in a timely manner. • Preparing documentation, case studies, and reports for relevant parties, as well as supporting FSL funding acquittals, as required.

Key selection criteria:

Mandatory skills and qualification:

- Full practicing certificate to practice law in Victoria.
- Three (3) years post admission experience

Highly desirable:

- Strong experience in civil law (intervention orders, tenancy, infringements, and debt).
- Solid advocacy experience (Magistrates' Court & VCAT).
- Experience in working in a health justice partnership and/or a commitment to working holistically from within an interdisciplinary team.
- Experience responding to the legal needs of people with addiction and mental health vulnerabilities and/or demonstrated knowledge of the impact of legal issues on mental health and addiction recovery and rehabilitation.
- Experience delivering legal education (in our practice this largely involves capacity building sessions for our partner practitioners).
- Demonstrated commitment to access to justice, social justice and equality.

Desirable:

- An interest or experience in summary crime
- Familiarity with Action Step & VXT

Approval and acknowledgement:

Date PD created:	05 November 2026
Date PD last reviewed:	26 October 2025
PD approved by:	Director of Legal Service
Date of approval:	10 November 2026