

# Psychological and Psychiatric Medico-Legal Writing at the Helen Bamber Foundation

## Who we are

Rights Registering with your GP The Helen Bamber Foundation is a specialist human rights charity based in North London. Helen Bamber Foundation provides expert care and support for refugees and asylum seekers who have experienced extreme physical, sexual and psychological violence, abuse and exploitation.

The individuals we work with have been subjected to atrocities including: state-sponsored torture; religious / political persecution; human trafficking; forced labour; sexual exploitation; gender-based and 'honor-based' violence. Many of our clients have been repeatedly victimised over many months and years.

We work with hundreds of survivors of cruelty from all over the world, including men and women from Syria, Albania, Ghana, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, India, Afghanistan, China and Vietnam.

The Helen Bamber Foundation delivers a range of integrated services that address the complex needs and vulnerabilities of survivors. We offer survivors access to an individually tailored programme of specialist psychological care and physical rehabilitation activities alongside a Medical Advisory Clinic, expert medico-legal documentation, safeguarding, welfare and housing support, creative arts and employability skills programmes.

## Medico-Legal Report Writing

Clients of the Helen Bamber Foundation have either fled extreme violence or abuse and / or been trafficked to the UK against their will. Many of our clients therefore seek international

protection (asylum) in the UK. Navigating the UK asylum process is challenging for survivors of torture and human cruelty. Disorientation and memory impairment as a result of trauma is often interpreted as negative credibility and often results in a refusal of survivor's application for legal protection.

The lack of stability and safety, and threat of being returned to a violent or exploitative situation in their country of origin, are incredibly detrimental to our clients' recovery.

In order to support the just determination of survivors' claims for asylum and thus maximise their opportunity for recovery, we operate a Medico-Legal Report (MLR) service.

Survivors of torture and human cruelty often suffer a myriad of physical and psychological health problems. As a psychological or psychiatric MLR writer, you will be asked to provide your independent expert opinion about the mental health sequelae of a client's past experiences of cruelty or ill-treatment.

These reports document the impact of the client's past experiences and explain any clinical concerns inherent relating to whether it is safe to return someone to their country of origin.

## Activities

We recruit and train psychologists and psychiatrists to undertake assessments of clients and prepare MLRs. You may sometimes be asked to prepare these reports in collaboration with doctors from a physical health background (e.g

GPs) who may document any injuries or scars that a client has resulting from their ill treatment.

## Approach

MLR writers assess clients in specially designed on-site consulting rooms. Assessments typically require two appointments, typically two to three hours on each occasion, depending on the client's history and presentation. These assessment sessions should take place within the working hours of the Helen Bamber Foundation (i.e. 9am-5.30pm Monday to Friday).

The report is then typically drafted off-site by the report writer (generally within 20 working days of the assessment appointment). Each report takes about six to eight hours to draft, but may take longer in the early stages of learning to prepare these reports. Reports are then reviewed by Helen Bamber Foundation's inhouse legal team. You will be given feedback about any issues that may need to be addressed to strengthen or enhance the report. This provides an excellent opportunity for learning more about working with legal colleagues and the legal system.

We request that each MLR writer prepares at least four reports a year. Doctors can offer to write reports pro bono or can be paid for each report.

## Psychologists

Due to the requirement for the professionals writing the reports to be considered expert by the court, we are not able to accept applications from clinical or counselling psychologists still in training. Generally, we require you to have at least two years' post-qualifying experience, but this is flexible depending on the level of contact you have had with this client group in your clinical work. It is advisable to have separate indemnity insurance.

Psychiatrists: Report writing psychiatrists should have the MRCPsych or equivalent, be licensed with the GMC to practice, have indemnity cover, and be in a consultant, career grade or higher training post (or retired from such a post).

## Training

Experience of writing medico-legal reports in other contexts is helpful but not essential. We offer a one-day training course which we run twice a year for new Medico-Legal Report Writers. This includes training on: asylum law; assessment of psychological sequelae of torture; human trafficking; and psychological therapies.

Each new report writer will then shadow an experienced MLR writer during an assessment and be involved in the reviewing process of that report. We may ask that new doctors are shadowed during their first report assessment depending on their level of previous experience.

Please note, the first two reports you prepare are considered part of your training. Training is therefore not considered complete until these reports have been prepared and reviewed. These two training reports are prepared on a pro bono basis on behalf of the MLR writer.

## Support for consultant MLR writers

All MLR writers are strongly encouraged to attend our bi-monthly Peer Group Meetings which take place between 6.30pm and 8pm on different days of the week. These offer peer support and as well as ongoing educational/CPD opportunities.

## Who do I contact?

If you are interested in training to be a Medico-Legal Report writer and meet the relevant criteria, please send your C.V. and a short covering letter explaining your interest to our Head of Therapies:

Dr Christina Curry

[christina.curry@helenbamber.org](mailto:christina.curry@helenbamber.org)