

SOUTH WEST

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Legal team works from home to keep up the good work

A team of volunteer lawyers is working hard from home to keep up their free advice service on everything from custody battles to holiday refunds

Julie Sanderson, South-West Satellite

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 Inala Hub Community Legal service director Jonathan Ward working at home.

Instead of closing down in the COVID-19 crisis, the Inala Hub Community Legal service is hard at work giving its legal advice by telephone, with a surge in requests for help in some areas, including getting travel refunds.

Hub Community Legal director Jonathan Ward said travel-based disputes had always been in the mix of cases handled at the Hub.

Now the team of mainly volunteer lawyers and law students is handling many extra requests.

“People have saved for their cruises and flights, paid their money and may now face complicated and opaque processes to get their money refunded,” Mr Ward said.

His full advice about holiday refunds is below.

With his team now switched to telephone consultations, Mr Ward is keeping to a tight schedule in a service that usually offers up to 3500 pieces of free legal advice a year.

“With the new arrangements, there are longer waiting times, and we are getting difficult cases in child protection, family and criminal law as well as a lot of employment law matters,” he said.

Instead of face-to-face consultations with experienced volunteer lawyers, and their small team of full-time lawyers, the service is now based on telephone or online discussions.

The initial point of contact for clients is still with their team of volunteer law students, but they are also working remotely with laptops provided by the service.

The Hub offers advice on family law, family violence, child protection, powers of attorney, consumer disputes, credit and debt, traffic offences, car accidents, civil matters, problems between neighbours, employment, minor criminal law, discrimination, school and education exclusions, sexual harassment and human rights law.

“We don’t turn people away, we’ll try to provide people with a referral to another service if necessary,” he said.

“We have a team of very experienced lawyers who volunteer their time and normally provide face-to-face interviews during three clinic sessions a week.”

“As an example, a couple of our volunteer lawyers usually represent large employers, but here they might represent the employee in the dispute,” he said.

They had to be careful with conflicts of interest and sometimes had to refer a client elsewhere to avoid their lawyers being asked to advise on both sides of the same dispute.

Mr Ward said organising the whole service to run remotely and cover close to their normal workload had been an enormous challenge.

“We’re still ripping through them; we’ll achieve our targets this year,” he said.

To speak to the legal service staff phone 3372 7677 or [see their website](#).

Here is Jonathan Ward’s advice on seeking a holiday refund.

Many people are seeking refunds on their travel plans at the moment, and some are frustrated due to difficulties getting through to call centres and finding an answer to their queries.

The Australian Consumer Law, general contract law and the terms and conditions of your agreement will apply to these situations.

In general, if you are cancelling your ticket, then it would be considered a “change of mind”, and the terms and conditions of your agreement apply.

If the business is cancelling your ticket, then they are likely to be responsible for a refund or other compensation for the cost of the ticket, and, in some cases, other loss that resulted.


For example, the cancellation of motels if a train trip is cancelled.

If, however, the business has no choice but to cancel due to government restrictions, then the situation may be more complicated.

You may also check any travel insurance policies that you have bought, or have connected with the credit card that you used.

In any event, the best place to start is to write a letter or email to the business. Make it very clear what the problem is and what is the solution that you would like to achieve. [The Australian Consumer and Competition Commission website](#) has some very useful information about the law in these situations, and you can get advice about these matters from your local Community Legal Centre.



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