

# LEGAL SUPPORT TEAM HANDOUT



# INTRODUCTION

*Legal Support might be more accurately called Police Station Support, and shouldn't be confused with the role of Legal Observer.*

Unlike Legal Observers, who do risk arrest by joining activists on the ground, the Legal Support Team or LST (often called Arrestee Support Team) should at no stage jeopardise their own position with regards to arrest. You are no use to anyone on the inside of the police station! This means that on many actions you will be stationed away from the site on the end of the phone (though if the action is 'fluffy' enough, you may be able to observe from a distance).

*Your basic role is:*

- To liaise with the action co-ordinators, the solicitor(s) and the staff at the police station to ensure that all arrested activists receive the right support.
- Once activists are released you also need to ensure they get the right level of both emotional & physical support

Legal Support is in many ways an unrewarding role, but it is absolutely vital! You will be the last home after the action, often spending hours hanging around police stations into the small hours waiting for the last activists to be released. You won't share the glamour or excitement of the action, and your photo won't make the front pages but without you the action isn't possible. If you weren't there half of those taking part in the 'front-end' of the action would refuse to act!

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- A mobile phone and charger;
- Change for a landline, just in case;
- Numbers for the action co-ordinators, the solicitors, all local police stations, a few local taxi companies and B&Bs;
- Transport and a driver if you need one;
- Pen & paper, spare pens/refills for emergencies;
- Food & drink for yourself;
- Warm clothing – you could be hanging around late at night!
- A good book, or an essay to write – you may have time on your hands...
- Enough money to pay for taxi fares, food, coffee, beer, and in extreme circumstances accommodation for released activists;
- Food, drinks, cigarettes, newspapers and books for detained activists whilst they are in the police station (NB: all food will need to be in unopened, sealed packets – so no home made sandwiches or biscuits, drinks will need to be tetrapacks or unopened plastic bottles, and obviously no alcohol will be allowed);
- Anything else detained activists need – e.g. dry clothes, medication.

## **YOUR ROLE IN DETAIL**

- The LST will have a list of names and other useful details such as: Who arrestees would you like to contact if they are arrested (friends, family, work, college, etc.);
- Any special circumstances that affect the support they need, e.g.
  - Vegan diet;
  - Need regular medication;
  - Foreign national;
  - Planning to give a false name;
  - Outstanding warrants for arrests, breached bail conditions or bind-overs.

This list is absolutely confidential. You may deal with some of this information in your role as LST – please respect it’s confidentiality.

Don’t hold loud conversations over the phone in police station waiting rooms – take your mobile outside if necessary.

## **GIVING SUPPORT DURING AN ACTION**

Ideally the LST would have the following information from the Legal Observers:

- Who has been arrested;
- What have they been charged with;
- Which Police Station are they being taken to;
- Anything else – such as whether they are injured.

In reality we will probably (initially) have a rough idea of the number of arrestees and the police stations to which they are being taken. We will have some idea of the charges.

Bearing in mind that it can take several hours from the moment of arrest for someone to actually see the inside of a police cell and then be released, the LST will use this time to fill in the blanks.

In this time we will alert the solicitor that there have been arrests and start tracking down who has been arrested and where they have been taken.

Once we know for sure that they are being held, and where they are being held, we will begin to call friends and family as requested.

## **AT THE POLICE STATION**

*Remember the initial warning – you are not here to get arrested, so whatever else happens, stay out of trouble!*

You play three key roles here:

- Supporting the detainees – making them feel loved;
- Liaising with the solicitor(s);

- Meeting detainees on their release and gathering their names, telephone numbers and email addresses, in order that they can be supported going forward.

### ***Supporting the detainees***

In many cases you will feel perfectly able to walk into the police station and open dialogue with the desk staff. If not you'll have to skulk outside and rely on the solicitor to keep you informed. Remember that the desk staff are human beings, and respond to you. Be nice and they will most likely be nice back. Be confrontational and you could condemn your friends to several hours more detention (yes, it does happen!) or face arrest yourself.

You need to find out anything you don't already know:

- Who they are holding?
- Are they OK?
- Are they being charged?
- What they are charged with?
- Any indication of a release time?

You can try to get 'treats' (chocolate, cigarettes etc.), books, or dry clothes to detainees, but this is up to the station staff. Don't show your annoyance if they refuse. You can also use this opportunity to make sure the police know about people's dietary & medical needs. Ask the police to make sure that they release people into your care (and not out of a side exit!).

### ***Liaising with the Solicitor(s)***

By now the LST Co-ordinator will have called the solicitor to warn them of the arrests. They will have been asked to liaise with the LST representative at the police stations they are called to.

Introduce yourself and your role and asked to be kept informed. Suggest they pop out and chat to you once in a while so fellow activists and LST co-ordinators can stay in touch. It's all too easy for solicitors to swan into the station and be in there for hours with you outside none the wiser (in some cases not even sure they have arrived!)

### ***Meeting Detainees On Their Release***

For some people police custody may have been fine, for others it could have been traumatic. You need to deal with whatever situation arises and provide appropriate support. To many people being arrested is a really big deal. They could be very excited or upset and want to talk about it. Bring your listening skills with you!

As well as gathering their names, telephone numbers and email addresses, in order that they can be supported going forward all the above it's useful to get an idea from people of:

- If they have been charged;
- If they have been bailed to reappear at the station;
- What they have been charged with;
- Where and when they are due to appear in court;
- Whether they can be contacted for defendants meetings or court support.

So give them smiles, congratulations, hugs, dry clothes, fags, chocolate, and their bus fare home, but also get the info you need. They will be clutching a release sheet with all the details on. Ask to see it, explain why and take down the details. In some cases you might like to install them in the corner of a warm café or pub nearby (use

spare hours to find such a place)– somewhere you can send other detainees as they are released. You might need to call on volunteers to give people lifts etc. Use your initiative.

## **ONCE THEY ARE ALL RELEASED**

You may need to move on to the next police station, but sooner or later all detainees are likely to be out of police custody (except for those who were found in breach of bind-overs or bail, or had outstanding warrants, or refused to accept bail conditions).

Check with the LST co-ordinator that your figures match – i.e. the number arrested equals the number released and you haven't forgotten anyone!

Thank-you for making the action possible!

