

Sample Public Defender Social Work Job Descriptions

The three job descriptions included here are samples provided by North Carolina public defender offices. Because the job title, relevant tasks, and required skills vary by office, you may need to modify them for your office. **You can use these samples as a starting point and edit them to meet your needs.**

If your office has hired a social worker and you are willing to have your job description included in this collection, please contact Hannah Turner, Lab Senior Project Manager, at hturner@sog.unc.edu.

Samples are edited to remove jurisdiction-specific information.

Public Defender Social Worker Job Description: Sample 1

The primary purpose of the Public Defender Social Worker is to collaborate with attorneys to help clients address the underlying causes and consequences of their involvement in the criminal justice system.

Duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Visit clients in custody to conduct initial assessments, screenings, and interviews.
- Work with local jails to ensure clients are being treated for physical and behavioral health issues, including receiving the proper medications, if appropriate.
- Interview family, friends, teachers, employers, and others to obtain a complete picture of the client's situation.
- Investigate backgrounds, conduct assessments, and coordinate with other professionals to evaluate clients for mental health, physical, and/or substance use disorders.
- Obtain clients' records from all relevant sources; review records; and prepare summary of records.
- Develop mitigation evidence for pre-trial negotiations, trials, and sentencing purposes.
- Assist with trial preparation in felony cases in which mitigation will be used.
- Testify in court and/or present findings in the context of plea negotiations and conferences.
- Collaborate with attorneys to provide case management services for clients.
- Establish and maintain a database of local and state services and treatment options.
- Provide referrals for clients seeking housing, employment services, mental health or substance use treatment, and other social services.
- Lead in-house training sessions on social work topics for other office workers.

This position reports to the Public Defender.

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities / Competencies

Knowledge of: social work; placement and treatment options in the local community; screening diagnostic tools for client interviews including evidence-based risk and other assessment instruments; local jail policy and procedures; and mitigation.

Skills in: strong oral and written communication; organizational and time management skills; computers and word processing to prepare reports, summaries, mitigation notebooks, and any other relevant documents.

Ability to: schedule work to achieve results on time; prepare and use assessment screenings for use in matching clients to placement services and developing mitigation factors; work with jails to ensure proper treatment for client; collaborate with attorneys; build relationships with community partners; make pertinent observations and analyze those observations in the context of the client's case; and interface and build relationships with people of diverse backgrounds.

Minimum Education and Experience Requirements

Graduation from a four-year college or university, preferably in the field of counseling, psychology, criminal justice, social work, or other related human services field.

Preference for applicants with experience in criminal justice settings.

Public Defender Social Worker Job Description: Sample 2

The Office of the Public Defender is seeking a social worker who is qualified in forensic and prospective social work services that are necessary to indigent defense lawyers representing adult and juvenile clients in criminal, juvenile and family court matters. The social worker would participate not only in the courtroom, but also to advocate for clients in their interactions with community professionals, a task many are unable to navigate without assistance.

Duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Conduct client and family member interviews; and write reports of client and family member interviews for other members of the defense team.
- Identify and obtain appropriate services based on the client's stated needs, such as access to housing, appropriate mental health and medical services, employment, educational opportunities and other support services.
- Work with attorneys to coordinate client cases and advocacy.
- Assist in communication between attorney and client when necessary.
- Establish and develop relationships with community services and potential supports, including, but not limited to, the local mental health authority, law enforcement, community supervision, the housing authority, adult education services, community leaders, and religious communities.
- Appear in court settings with client and monitor progress of clients throughout the pendency of their cases(s).
- Assist in client transition to treatment providers and court as required.
- Participate in visitation and other important meetings with the Department of Social Services and/or Department of Juvenile Justice to enable parents to properly parent their children.

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities / Competencies

Knowledge of: criminal justice system; public and private organizations and community resources; alternative treatment and/or placement facilities both in and outside of North Carolina; and funding sources for alternative treatment and/or placement facilities.

Skills in: excellent communication and advocacy skills; and proficiency with Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

Ability to: meet high demands and deadlines often associated with advocating for the rights of consumers within the criminal justice system; develop and conduct educational seminars; and work both independently and as a part of a multi-disciplinary team.

Public Defender Social Worker Job Description: Sample 3

Goal:

Improve legal outcomes, reduce recidivism, and increase opportunities for indigent defendants by adding a Client Advocate to our staff.

By reducing jail-time and increasing access to treatment, we can improve outcomes.

Description:

This position will assist in transforming our office to provide wraparound services for clients. Our representation will now include an avenue to directly address the reason many of our clients are charged with a crime (substance use that led to a drug possession charge, mental illness that resulted in a violent encounter, homelessness that led to a trespassing arrest) and also connect them with other resources to improve their overall wellbeing.

The Client Advocate (CA) will be involved with identified individuals immediately. The CA will forge connections and relationships with local resources to develop the most effective case plan. A Client Advocate (CA) will engage with court appointed defendants throughout their case, identify needs and connect them with specific services that will benefit them during our representation and after their case concludes.

Other duties could include:

- Providing information to public defenders to support lower sentencing arguments.
- Helping clients identify optimal treatment options and assisting with enrollment, logistics, and related needs to enable admittance and completion.
- Assisting clients with accessing health care and obtaining medications while in local jail.
- Assist clients with securing stable housing.

What We Do:

The Public Defender's Office works with adults charged with crimes for which they can face jail time. This can range from reckless driving to first degree murder. When someone is charged with a crime and subsequently jailed—for any period of time—that incarceration has dire consequences. These can include: loss of housing, loss of employment, loss of benefits and changes in child custody. Our clients also often are suffering from untreated mental illness and/or substance use disorder and don't have a way to access treatment and medications. Attorneys in our office assist these clients with the issues directly related to their court cases but do not have the skillset or time to fully assist the clients that have needs outside this scope. The justice-involved individuals that we serve could benefit from a Client Advocate to fill in these gaps. These efforts will give our clients access to treatment and social services, decrease the time spent in jails and prisons and reduce future contact with the criminal legal system.