

Interest on Lawyer Account Fund of the State of New York

Funding civil legal assistance for low-income New Yorkers since 1984

Justice Infrastructure Project **Description of Project Vision (December 2024)**

Provided below are descriptions of two key objectives for the IOLA Justice Infrastructure Project based on IOLA's statewide efforts to engage community, review information, analyze data and solicit feedback on improvements to the civil legal services ecosystem to increase access to justice.

Statewide Function A: Support, Knowledge, and Information for Legal Services

Organizations

This statewide function would seek to create consistency and efficiency for the legal services community by identifying opportunities for coordination, fostering collaboration, improving awareness of legal services, and supporting legal services organizations seeking assistance with technology, policies, governance, training, and other functions essential to the delivery of civil legal aid. This statewide function may develop as a single entity or as a collaborative of uniquely capable organizations but it would operate independently of IOLA.

Initial functionality and features of this statewide function would include:

- Development and maintenance of statewide **training materials** for staff assisting clients in civil legal matters and various administrative proceedings
- Coordinated **knowledge management** – curated, organized and accessible information, opinions, memos, research, etc. for each civil matter type
- Development and maintenance of consistent **outreach and informational materials**, including brief videos, that can be used by legal services organizations for public engagement
- Centralized **technology support** for grantees interested in utilizing current IT infrastructure (IT support) as well as adopting technology innovations (such as AI tools) and implementing new technologies (such as new case management systems or call center platforms as well as various IT and cybersecurity training for all staff), including coordination of grantees with similar interests and sharing best practices from grantees who have already implemented certain technologies or other efforts
- Maintenance of a **comprehensive statewide directory** of legal services resources and capacity

IOLA would seek to prioritize the development of initial capabilities of this statewide support function. However, IOLA also expects that additional opportunities for statewide coordination, collaboration and support will emerge over time. As such, the statewide support function will need to evolve and adapt to the needs, challenges and opportunities of the New York legal services community. For example, there may be opportunities for coordinated data collection that could inform strategic advocacy, identify best practices, assist with evaluation, reduce data analysis and reporting burden by individual grantees and foster collaboration.

Statewide Function B: Legal Information and Referral for the Public

This statewide function is intended to foster an integrated ecosystem of consistent, reliable, comprehensive and updated information for critical and complex life problems, including legal problems. It will seek to amplify current resources, integrate with existing platforms, enhance functionality, and facilitate coordination among stakeholders. IOLA is mindful that various information and referral mechanisms for legal and social organizations have been developed and launched in recent years that may warrant strengthening and expanding. During Phase 1, many organizations shared their experience with these systems – describing both the benefits of these platforms and the challenges. Importantly, many community organizations communicated that the current infrastructure does not adequately respond to their needs or those of their clients, noting that information was often incomplete or inaccurate, and that the platforms were often difficult to use, did not provide closed-loop referrals, did not allow for user accounts, and did not integrate with informational resources when referrals could not be made. As such, IOLA’s vision is to leverage the resources and platforms that currently exist, while finding opportunities to integrate and enhance them to make the user experience more efficient and impactful.

This function is intended to be public-facing and combine technology, information and multiple means for engagement (call center, web and mobile with human response, live chat and AI tools) to enable effective triage of an individual’s issues and circumstances. Using real-time information from community resources (including legal services organizations), this function (both human and technology-enabled) would advise individuals and organizations about resources that could assist them or information they can use to effectively resolve their circumstances when a referral is not possible.

Effective, comprehensive and consistent statewide outreach would be used to develop a pervasive sense of awareness encouraging New York residents – and the trusted community-based organizations that people in need turn to for help – to seek assistance from the platforms using the comprehensive information developed for this function. Grantees would be encouraged to direct clients to such platforms for intake, screening and referral services. A statewide, centralized intake for participating grantee organizations may develop as an element of this function.

When possible, the statewide information and referral function would seek to integrate other platforms providing assistance to New York residents, such as 2-1-1, LawHelpNY, NY Crime Victims Legal Help, HOPP (Home Owner Protection Program), and the NYC Bar Association’s Lawyer Referral and Information Service (LRIS), Just-Fix, Unlock NYC, Heat Seek, virtual hearing platforms of the courts or administrative agencies, online dispute resolution, e-filing and court record platforms, administrative records and other platforms that can enhance the breadth of information that can assist New York residents experiencing complex and critical life problems. **Appendix A** provides illustrative client journeys intended to demonstrate how an integrated function of information and referral would work for New Yorkers and the organizations that assist them. The extent of this integration and the full functionality will evolve over time with the phases of its development and implementation subject to various considerations.

The development of this function will include implementation of a comprehensive data strategy to provide pathways to strategic advocacy enabling continual efforts to understand and reduce the justice gap in New York.

Initial functionality and features of this statewide function would include:

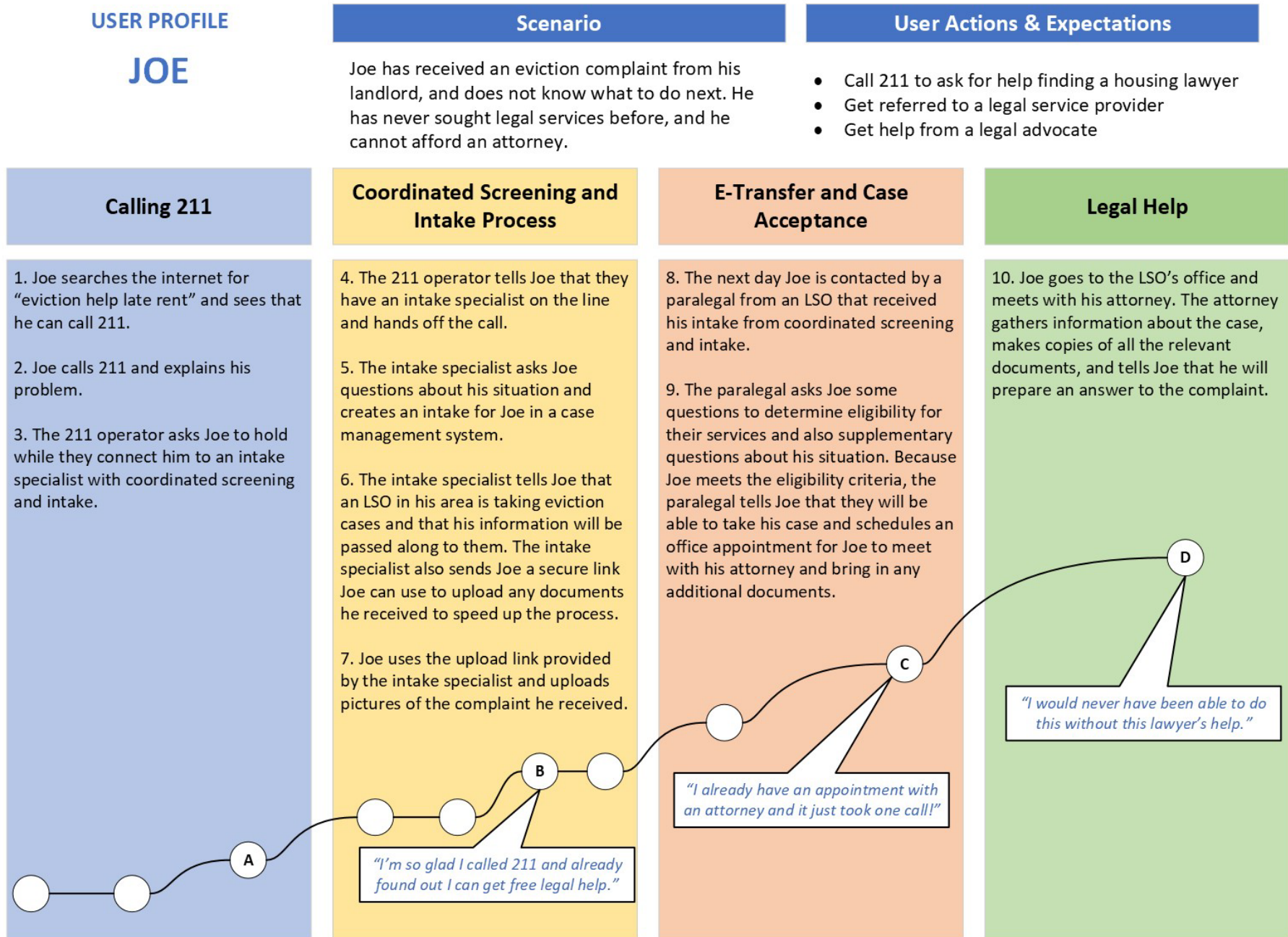
- Development of an authoritative source of information about **available legal resources** and information in New York that can be integrated into other Information & Referral platforms
- Fully-staffed, **state-of-the art call center** with trained and certified advisors available for intake, screening and referral
- **Real-time information** about capacity and availability for community-based organizations across the state to provide assistance, including legal services organizations
 - Centralized intake and referral to local organizations with available capacity, when possible
- Web-Based and Mobile-Enabled Technology
 - **User accounts** enabling people to store and share key documents and information
 - The ability for grantees and other organizations to assist users in creating accounts
 - **Specialized access** and capabilities for trusted community members who assist in connecting clients to social and government resources
 - **Live chat**
 - **Generative AI** that can assist residents with assessing their circumstances and identifying new steps or the need for further assistance
 - Augmented intelligence to assist individuals in their decision making
 - Negotiation assistance to assist individuals in the use of constructive language that will facilitate resolution
 - Direct **appointment scheduling** with service providers
 - Push notifications and **text reminders** for key dates and appointments
 - Library of **plain-language information**, including short videos, designed to assist individuals who are able to use such information in seeking effective resolution
 - The platform will leverage the coordinated, statewide resources developed and maintained by the statewide support function (above) for legal issues
 - Processes to ensure that individuals with complex matters, health and safety risks, and particular vulnerabilities are promptly and effectively connected to resources that can assist them

The design, development and implementation of these two key statewide Functions is intended to be done through an inclusive lens mindful of the importance of cultural competency, language access, disability access, elder access and the ability for all persons to effectively access and use these resources. Achieving this objective will require a continual and adapting commitment to this ideal and the involvement of stakeholders with lived experience that can inform this design, development and implementation.

The development of these statewide functions will require careful consideration of governance, data security, data standards, technology resiliency, maintenance, quality control, testing and evaluation. To inform these design and structural issues, IOLA will create advisory group(s) of grantees, community-based organizations and other experts with particularly relevant experience and expertise.

Appendix A

Illustrative Client Journeys



USER PROFILE

Sasha

Scenario

Sasha works as a nanny and left their previous employer because they weren't getting paid overtime. They think they're owed a lot of money, but they've never hired a lawyer before and don't know where to go for help.

User Actions & Expectations

- Find legal information about unpaid wages
- Apply for help online and communicate through text messages
- Obtain legal help

Online Search and Application

1. Sasha searches the internet for “unpaid overtime help” and finds LawHelpNY.
2. They read the information available on LawHelpNY and realize that they are entitled to much more pay. They also see that there is a link to apply for legal services help.
3. Sasha completes an application for legal services help and provides their cell phone number to receive text message updates.

“I really hope it’s this easy... I don’t have time to make a ton of phone calls trying to find help.”

Coordinated Screening and Intake Process

4. A coordinated screening and intake specialist receives and reviews Sasha’s request for assistance.
5. The intake specialist reviews the referral database and finds that no LSOs are currently accepting clients with overtime and unpaid wages claims.
6. The intake specialist sends Sasha a text message explaining that no LSO referrals are available but that he can send Sasha a referral to the local bar association lawyer referral service.
7. Sasha agrees and the intake specialist sends them an SMS message telling them that their application will be passed along to the lawyer referral service.

“I can’t believe I’m getting referred to a lawyer and I didn’t even have to call anyone.”

Referral and Follow-Up

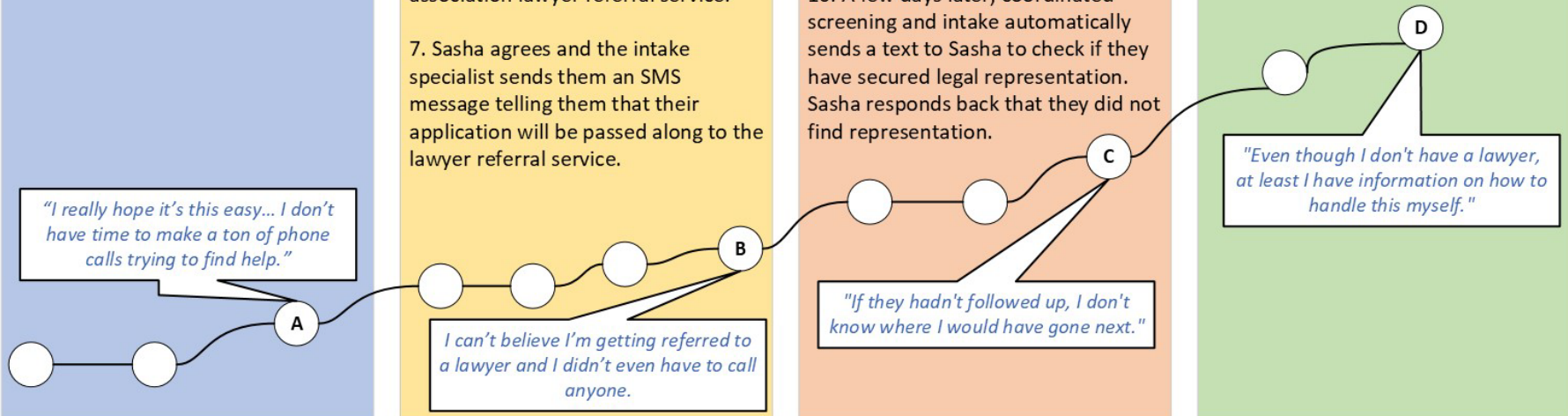
8. The next day Sasha is contacted via text message by the lawyer referral service to set up a screening call.
9. During the screening call, the referral service explains that it charges a \$100 screening fee in order to meet with an attorney. Sasha explains that they don't have \$100 to pay an attorney. Sasha asks if there are any attorneys who might take the case for free but is told that there are none.
10. A few days later, coordinated screening and intake automatically sends a text to Sasha to check if they have secured legal representation. Sasha responds back that they did not find representation.

“If they hadn’t followed up, I don’t know where I would have gone next.”

Legal Self-Help

11. Via text, coordinated screening and intake asks Sasha if they would like more information on how to handle the issue on their own. Sasha responds that they would like more information.
12. Coordinated screening and intake texts Sasha a link to resources that Sasha can review in order to handle their case pro se.

“Even though I don’t have a lawyer, at least I have information on how to handle this myself.”



USER PROFILE

Mary

Scenario

Mary relies on food stamps to feed her family. She was recently denied her food stamps benefits and doesn't know what to do.

User Actions & Expectations

- Identify next steps for benefits appeal
- Get legal self-help materials to assist with appeal
- Find additional social services

Find and Call Coordinated Screening and Intake

1. Mary goes to OTDA to ask about the denial of her food stamps application. She's told that she needs to appeal the decision, but that OTDA cannot help her with that.
2. As she is leaving the office, she sees a poster advertising free legal help for issues like housing and public benefits.
3. Mary calls coordinated screening and intake.

Coordinated Screening and Intake Process

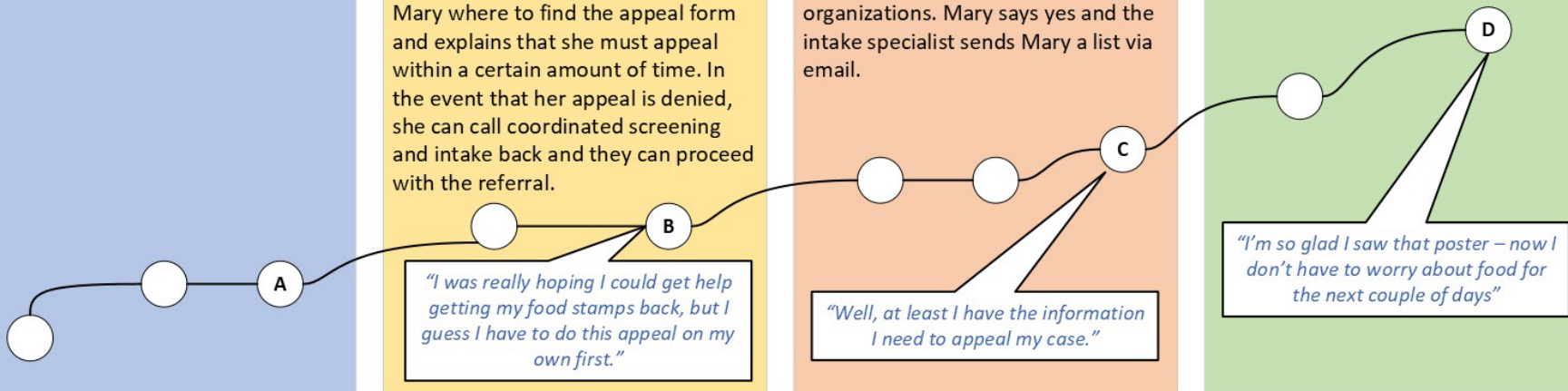
4. The intake specialist asks Mary questions about her situation and creates a pre-screen in the case management system to record her information. The intake specialist lets Mary know that if she needs to call back, all of the information Mary has shared, as well as any referrals made, will be stored in a secure system, so that Mary will only have to update any new information on her next call.
5. The intake specialist tells Mary that she must first file an appeal of the denial before she can be referred to an LSO. The intake specialist tells Mary where to find the appeal form and explains that she must appeal within a certain amount of time. In the event that her appeal is denied, she can call coordinated screening and intake back and they can proceed with the referral.

Legal Self-Help Materials

6. The intake specialist asks Mary if she would like to receive a link by email or text message to a website that has information about how to file an appeal of a food stamps denial.
7. Mary says she'd like to receive it in a text message and the intake specialist sends the link.
8. The intake specialist tells Mary that while she is waiting for a decision on her appeal, there may be community organizations that can help her. The intake specialist asks if she would like to receive a list of those organizations. Mary says yes and the intake specialist sends Mary a list via email.

Social Service Help

9. Mary contacts a local food bank that she didn't know about which was included in the list of organizations provided by coordinated screening and intake.
10. Mary goes to the food bank and is able to get donated canned goods and fresh fruit and vegetables for her family.



USER PROFILE

Helen

Scenario

Helen has recently become permanently injured and is unable to work. She applied for and was denied Social Security Disability Insurance benefits.

User Actions & Expectations

- Get referred directly to an LSO
- Identify next steps for benefits appeal
- Find additional social services

Calling a Non-Profit

1. Helen’s friend suggests that she call a community-based organization’s specialized hotline to see if they can help her figure out what to do.
2. Helen calls the specialized hotline and explains her problem.
3. The hotline operator asks Helen to hold while they connect her to an intake specialist at coordinated screening and intake.

Coordinated Screening and Intake Process

4. The hotline operator tells Helen that they have an intake specialist on the line and hands off the call.
5. The intake specialist asks Helen questions about her situation and creates a pre-screen and intake in the case management system to record her information.
6. The intake specialist tells Helen that her case can be referred to an LSO that may be able to help and that her information will be passed along.
7. The intake specialist also asks if Helen would like a list of community service providers that might be able to provide other types of assistance in the meantime.

E-Transfer and Case Acceptance

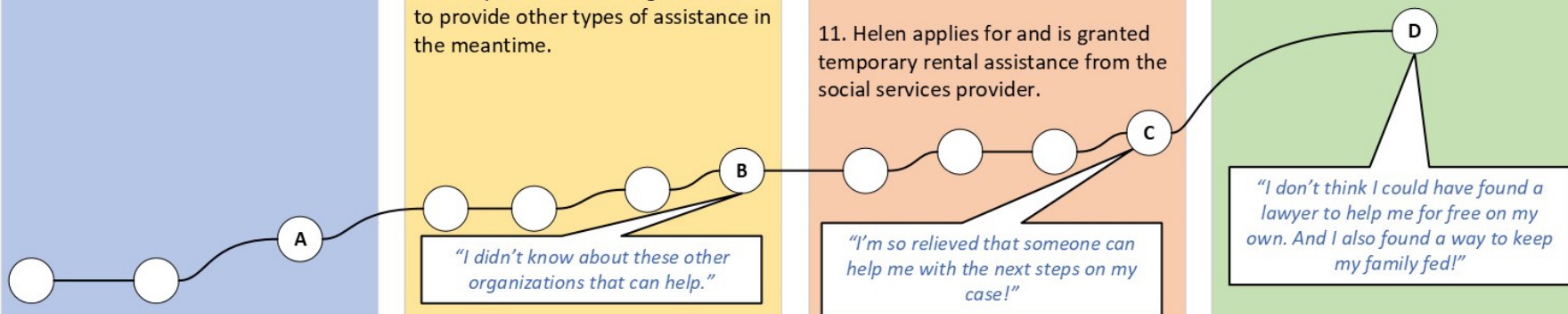
8. The next day Helen is contacted by a paralegal from an LSO that received her intake from coordinated screening and intake.
9. The paralegal asks Helen some questions to determine eligibility for their services. Because Helen meets the eligibility criteria, the paralegal tells her that they will be able to take her case and schedules an office appointment for her to meet with her attorney.

Social Services Referral

10. Helen contacts a rental assistance provider that she found on the list of organizations provided by coordinated screening and intake.
11. Helen applies for and is granted temporary rental assistance from the social services provider.

Legal Help

12. Helen goes to the LSO’s office and meets with her attorney. The attorney confirms the information about the case and makes copies of all the relevant documents, and tells Helen that they will prepare an appeal of her denial.



"I didn't know about these other organizations that can help."

"I'm so relieved that someone can help me with the next steps on my case!"

"I don't think I could have found a lawyer to help me for free on my own. And I also found a way to keep my family fed!"