



Today's episode is all about a rather unknown service of the Studierendenwerk. The free legal advice service helps with legal problems of all kinds. Our lawyer Sabine Gehweiler tells you how it works.

Mang: Hi and welcome. It's time again for a new episode of our my-stuwe podcast. Today we want to introduce you to a service of the Studierendenwerk that many of you certainly don't know about yet – free legal advice. I studied in Tübingen myself a few years ago and could have used legal advice a time or two – unfortunately, I didn't know about the service. To make things different for you, Sabine Gehweiler is our guest today. The lawyer has been responsible for our legal advice for many years. We're going to get to the bottom of her today...

Hello Ms Gehweiler, thank you for being with us today. Perhaps it would make sense to start by telling us something about yourself and your career. Our students should get a better impression of who is advising them on legal issues.

Gehweiler: Hello, thank you very much for the invitation. I work outside the Studierendenwerk as a lawyer, mainly in the area of family law, not necessarily as a classical lawyer, but rather in the area of arbitration and mediation, because I think it makes more sense to solve these family law issues amicably, if possible. From this experience I can also bring a lot to my work in the student union, which I have been doing for about 25 years now.

Mang: That's a very long time. How did you end up here with us, or how did it come about that you also wanted to deal with student problems?

Gehweiler: Well, the offer actually came to my attention during my law studies. Then when I was in the family phase – I had three children within two years (there are twins) – I could no longer work full time as a lawyer. And that's when it really happened that I could start

here. From the beginning, I really enjoyed working with the young people, which is why I have always stayed here.

Mang: That's a nice story. Then it actually worked out that way. Now let's clarify in the next step what legal counselling is in the first place. What kind of problems can it help with? Please give us a few practical examples from your everyday work so that we can get a better idea.

Gehweiler: In fact, what I do is purely legal advice. It is always an initial consultation to help sort out what is actually going on. A very large area in which I advise is, of course, tenancy law – a constant problem in Tübingen. Then there's university and examination law; I've also gained a certain amount of experience in this area, where you first have to sort things out: Does it actually make sense, is there a chance, is it worth fighting – is it perhaps better to refer to the student advisory service. I've gained a lot of experience in that area. Another area is, of course, financing your studies, maintenance from your parents, all kinds of contracts, such as subscription or mobile phone contracts, there are often complications. One annoying area is still the broadcasting fee. It's a perennial topic – it's very badly regulated for young people. For a while, I tried to change this politically, but I did not succeed, so I can only appeal to all students to come to me in good time before they get a letter from the bailiff.

Mang: These are very multifaceted issues that you are confronted with. If I have understood correctly, you have also emphasised that you provide advice. That means you don't conduct legal proceedings or formulate documents for the students. Therefore, it seems important to me to clarify what legal counselling ex-

pressly does NOT do?

**Gehweiler:** I don't do representation, I don't take on mandates and I don't go to court. What I do sometimes is help with formulation. I have many foreign students here in counselling. Sometimes it can help to help them formulate a simple letter in German. I do things like that, as far as time allows.

**Mang:** Okay, all right. Let's say I have a legal problem that I can't solve on my own. How do I get in touch with you? How do I make an appointment and how long do I have to wait?

**Gehweiler:** It is now very easy to make an appointment because an online appointment system has recently been set up. There is a link on the homepage: You can choose between a telephone appointment or a personal appointment. And that really works very well. At the moment, the lead time should be about two weeks.

**Mang:** All right. And the address is my-stuwe.de. Yes, in the psychotherapeutic counselling centre of the Studierendenwerk, purely video-based talks have recently become possible. How do you see that? Is something like that also possible in your area? Or are there alternative counselling options, for example via email or telephone?

**Gehweiler:** I see the advantage of video counselling more with the Psychological Counselling Centre than with me. But I am basically open to all kinds of technology if it works. I tend to need documents, so it's better to clarify the situation through personal contact or a telephone conversation than by e-mail. Otherwise I get flooded with emails and I just need details of the facts. The personal conversation is actually the best, but I realise that for many (the Studierendenwerk now has a large catchment area) this is more difficult. Telephone appointments are offered; sometimes it also makes sense to send documents by mail after the first contact, because as a lawyer I have to clarify a lot with the documents. So it's a mixture of phone call and mail for documents, sometimes I also do some research and then give the answer by mail. But the first contact should already take place in a conversation.

**Mang:** That definitely makes sense. Let's go one step further. So now I have made an appointment with you. Where does the personal legal counselling take place?

**Gehweiler:** Personal legal counselling takes place in the

building of the dormitory administration, not via the main entrance, but around the corner, to the Technical Service Housing, that's where the entrance is and that's also where you can find the legal counselling.

**Mang:** Great – and for you for completeness: The address of our halls of residence is Fichtenweg 5 in Tübingen. Another question for students is certainly: Should I prepare for this appointment? Are there any important documents I might need to bring with me or can I just drop by?

**Gehweiler:** Both are possible, but if it is a more complex matter, then I am dependent on written documents. So it is good if you bring contracts or notices that you have received from an authority and – also important: that you bring what you have already written yourself in the matter. So that I can get a brief overview.

**Mang:** But that certainly varies from case to case. Students usually have manageable financial means. So what about payment – will I have to pay for legal advice?

**Gehweiler:** Legal advice for students is free of charge. In inverted commas – because the student union fee is paid and this service – this social service – is financed through that.

**Mang:** And how can we imagine the whole thing in practice now? When I have made an appointment with you and we then sit down together. How does that work, how much time do I have to plan for such a conversation?

**Gehweiler:** We make appointments every half hour and either it can be clarified in the half hour (look at what it's about, research, give advice) or a follow-up appointment is made, which can then also take place by phone if more complex things still need to be researched. But many things can also be clarified in the half hour.

**Mang:** Finally, we are of course interested in how this offer is received by the students. Do you have a lot to do at the moment? And have you noticed any changes here since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the Corona pandemic?

**Gehweiler:** The Corona pandemic has had a clear impact. During this time, the number of counselling sessions has declined, which I also explain by the fact

that, on the one hand, only telephone counselling has taken place in many cases and the personal appointments have fallen away, which in some cases simply make sense. Some things can't be counseled well over the phone. Then I think a large area of rental matters has fallen away because many students lived at home and then either didn't have rental problems – hopefully – or also got support from their parents. Now the numbers are slowly rising again. The war in Ukraine – I can't yet see that this is having any effect. I have also had some Ukrainian students in counselling, but overall it seems to be quite well organised. It doesn't affect me that much.

Mang: Wonderful, Ms Gehweiler, thank you very much. Perhaps you too will find yourselves in a situation where you need legal support. In such cases, Ms Gehweiler will be happy to advise you. I thank you for listening and hope to hear from you again soon. Ciao!

*\*Note: This transcription of the podcast was generated with the help of machine software. We apologise for any minor discrepancies or spelling mistakes.*