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## Hackney Community Law Centre Annual Report 2012

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Award winning legal services  
to the community



## Welcome to the 2012 Annual Report of the Hackney Community Law Centre!

Hackney Community Law Centre (HCLC) is a charity employing solicitors and paralegals to provide free and independent legal advice and representation to people living, working or studying in the London Borough of Hackney and neighbouring boroughs. We also aim to highlight injustice that we find in individual cases to bring about social change at local and national government levels.

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# WELCOME

Sean Canning,  
Manager and Ian  
Rathbone, Chair



As we approach the end of 2012, I am pleased to report that the Law Centre has been at the forefront of efforts to ensure that local residents in Hackney are able to access high quality legal advice services against a tough economic background of cuts in funding and the ongoing challenges presented by the government's welfare reforms.

Following the passage of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) earlier this year, many areas of social welfare law including debt, employment, immigration and welfare benefits will be removed from the scope of public funding from April 2013. These cuts will significantly impact on our services.

I would like to thank the staff for their hard work and energy throughout the year. I congratulate our housing solicitor **Paul Heron** who won the Law Society's Excellence Award for In-House Solicitor of

the Year. Congratulations to **Diane Morrison** for becoming our latest solicitor to come from training. We have also continued to benefit from the wealth of experience of **Nathaniel Mathews** (who also writes a highly respected and effective blog) and **Wendy Pettifer** as senior solicitors, along with **Val Thomas**, **Hilton Von Herbert** and **Hope Olugbola** who have also helped to contribute to the high standard of work we carry out for the people of Hackney. **Miranda Grell** has taken a new role as development officer and hit the ground running in terms of

raising our profile, developing the website, generating publicity, raising funds and helping to get the new 'Pop-up shops' off the ground. We are grateful to the London Borough of Hackney, London Legal Support Trust and London Councils for funding this vital post.

Sadly, we are saying goodbye to some colleagues, **Chorouk El-Adib**, **Maggie Crowley** and **Olu Adenuga**. We wish them all the very best for the future.

Our Law Centre could also not achieve all that it does without its volunteers and so I would also like to thank them for their impressive commitment as well as my colleagues on the Board of Directors. Finally, I would like to thank all our funders for their support and interest in our work.

**Ian Rathbone, Chair**  
December 2012

This has been my first year at the Law Centre and it's been an eventful one for the Law Centre and our users. Above all, our main priority – for staff, members and volunteers – is to succeed as a 'business' so that we are able to continue to respond to the needs of our users and the community we serve.

While much of the recent narrative has focussed on the impact of the LSC legal aid reforms, our business plan has focussed on securing new and innovative funding streams to create and sustain viable services which meet the needs of the people we serve. We were successful in securing significant help from the Big Lottery Advice Fund, which has helped maintain and expand our services.

### Among our achievements in 2012 have been the following:

- We helped close to 3000 Hackney people during the year through face-to-face and telephone advice, ongoing casework and representation across all areas of social welfare law.

- Our new Community 'Pop Up Shop' advice service at Hackney Central Library has so far helped over 300 residents with legal problems covering debt, employment, housing and welfare benefits thanks to funding from Matrix Chambers;
- We secured funding from the Trust for London to launch our new employment advice service;
- We secured funding to develop our volunteer and intern programme for the next two years.
- We have worked to build alliances and partnerships with colleagues from other law centres and community organisations to secure additional funding opportunities to create sustainable services for Hackney.

### Where do we go from here?

In spite of the funding challenges ahead, we have a clear vision for the future driven by our values and principles based on accessibility, quality and achieving good outcomes for users. In concert with our partners, we have been able to develop new services which will help us tackle the impact of poverty and help people exercise their legal rights to improve their quality of life. I thank my colleagues (both paid staff and volunteers) for their staying power and commitment. 2012 has been another tough but worthwhile year. 2013 looks like it will be just as tough, but we know that together with our colleagues elsewhere in the advice sector and others in the community we will continue to provide the kind of service and access to justice the people of Hackney expect and should have.

**Sean Canning, Manager**  
December 2012



# STORIES OF THE YEAR

## January & February 2012



Ian Rathbone and Matthew Howgate welcome new manager Sean Canning



Mrs Ama and Kwesi

### HCLC welcomes new manager

In January, HCLC welcomed Sean Canning to the Centre as our new manager. Sean, who has managed North Kensington Law Centre for the past eight years, took over from Matthew Howgate (pictured right) who had been interim manager since 2009. Welcoming Sean's appointment, HCLC Chair Ian Rathbone (pictured left) said: "Sean will bring a cutting edge to our work of making sure that everyone has access to justice and I am looking forward to continuing and expanding our work with his expert help".

### HCLC launches new website

In January, HCLC also unveiled a new website ([www.hclc.org.uk](http://www.hclc.org.uk)), designed for us pro bono by Jon Worth of Tech Politics ([www.techpolitics.eu](http://www.techpolitics.eu)). Alongside providing the critical information potential clients need to find out how we can help them, the website also integrated HCLC's facebook and twitter pages and now contains a special 'Chair's blog' where our Chair Ian Rathbone posts stories and comment of interest to people who care about Law Centres and access to justice issues. Visit the website at [www.hclc.org.uk](http://www.hclc.org.uk)

### Mrs Ama wins 9 year long immigration case!

In 2009, Mrs Ama and her son Kwasi approached HCLC in despair after having had been let down by four other immigration solicitors. HCLC immediately agreed to take on the case and spent the next three years seeking answers from the Home Office. In January, Mrs Ama and Kwasi were finally granted leave to remain in the UK. Mrs Ama's HCLC caseworker Maggie Crowley said: "After a long delay and much hardship suffered by our clients, I am delighted that the Home Office has granted our clients indefinite leave to remain in the UK. Our clients can now get on with their lives safe and secure in the knowledge that Hackney will continue to be their home".

"After a long delay and much hardship suffered by our clients, I am delighted that the Home Office has granted our clients indefinite leave to remain in the UK. Our clients can now get on with their lives safe and secure in the knowledge that Hackney will continue to be their home".

### Matrix Chambers helps set up new Community Law Shops

In February, Matrix Chambers made a significant donation to HCLC to support the work we were doing to set up our new 'Community Law Shops' pop-up advice service in Hackney. The provision of extra advisors in the Community Law Shops – supported and supervised by current Hackney Community Law Centre (HCLC) staff- is a key component of HCLC's efforts to engage with the needs of the local Hackney community. Through its special 'Causes Fund', Matrix donated £7,200 over two years towards the expenses of volunteer solicitors and the proposed Hackney Community Law Centre's 'Community Law Shops' for their first two years of operation.



Volunteer Simon Bowen and Development Officer Miranda Grell receive cheque from Matrix Chambers Chief Executive Lindsay Scott

### HCLC launches Youth Homelessness project

In February, Hackney Community Law Centre launched a new advice service for young people aged 16-24. Chorouk El-Adib, trainee solicitor, began working alongside advice & advocacy workers from Off Centre to provide specialist legal advice to young people at risk of eviction, homelessness, rent arrears and other related problems.



# FOCUS ON IMMIGRATION

‘Our casework showed a high demand for asylum advice, family reunion and domestic violence. Our drop-in and telephone advice service continued to be oversubscribed.’

2012 was another challenging year for HCLC’s immigration unit as we continued to respond to the growing demand for immigration advice across the borough.

Our casework showed a high demand for asylum advice, family reunion and domestic violence. Our drop-in and telephone advice service continued to be oversubscribed. The team forged and maintained links with external organisations such as the Hackney Migrant Centre (HMC) and the Hackney Information & Advice Consortium (HIAC) whom we work closely with to ensure as wide a provision of specialist immigration advice services as possible.

Following the introduction of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) immigration work will be removed ‘from scope’ except for clients in detention. This will lead to reduced access to immigration advice in Hackney hitting the most vulnerable members of the borough.

Sadly, in 2012, we said goodbye to Yvonne Stevens, immigration solicitor. We also said farewell to Maggie Crowley, immigration caseworker. We wish them both all the very best.



## ABENA AMA’S IMMIGRATION TESTIMONIAL

*My son Kwasi suffers from autism and mental health problems. He needs special care and education. For the last nine years, the Home Office have been trying to deport us to Ghana, a country I left thirty years ago when I was seventeen. I don’t believe that in Ghana there would be a special school or day centre for Kwasi. They don’t have the facilities to be able to value autistic children like they do here in the UK. Although Kwasi’s behaviour can be challenging, our neighbours and other local people have been encouraging and supportive. People like him here and are friendly to him; he knows the neighbours and they say hello. For years, I spent a lot of money on solicitors who were no help at all, and we had to suffer the constant insecurity of one court hearing after another. But Hackney Community Law Centre were very helpful. They took us on in 2009 and fought our case for three years, free of charge. In 2012, they helped us to finally win our appeal. Kwasi and I now have some stability and a future.*

# STORIES OF THE YEAR

## March, April & May 2012

### HCLC welcomes new patrons

In March, we were delighted to unveil our first official patrons. HCLC’s new patrons all have a connection to Hackney – either having lived or worked here. The new patrons have also all been actively involved in campaigning in the public arena on social issues such as housing and immigration, which are the areas of specialist legal advice we provide.

**Louise Christian**, high profile human rights solicitor, visited the Centre shortly after her appointment as a HCLC patron. Louise said: “As a Hackney resident and long standing admirer of Hackney Community Law Centre, I am very pleased to have been asked to become a patron and support the splendid work HCLC is doing. I hope to contribute to the work of the Law Centre personally by volunteering at HCLC’s new community legal advice sessions. The work that Hackney Community Law Centre is doing is enormously important for our community”.

### On being asked to become a patron journalist Jon Robins said...

“I would be delighted to be a patron. In fact, I am flattered to be asked to be involved with such a brilliant organization. I know that the Law Centre is a lifeline for many poor and vulnerable people in Hackney and it is shocking to me that such a vital service is under attack. I used to live off Clapton Square - so it’s an area I know well. It is an absolute scandal what’s happening to Law Centres. The scrapping of legal aid for social welfare law is shocking. As a journalist I’d like to try to ensure that those issues continue to be discussed”.

### On being asked to become a patron Peer Lord Low CBE said...

“I would be delighted to become a patron of HCLC and support the splendid work you are doing. I very much applaud the positive and dynamic way in which you are addressing the challenges which the not for profit sector faces.”

### Other HCLC patrons appointed in March were:

#### Diane Abbott MP

Member of Parliament for Hackney North and Stoke Newington

#### Nicky Gavron AM

Former Deputy Mayor of London and currently the London Assembly’s Opposition Spokeswomen for Housing

#### Manjit S Gill QC

Barrister (Queens Counsel) and founder member of the Discrimination Law Association

#### Meg Hillier MP

Member of Parliament for Hackney South and Shoreditch

**Jean Lambert MEP** London-wide Member of the European Parliament and long-time campaigner for refugees and asylum seekers

#### Rajiv Menon QC

Hackney resident and barrister (Queens Counsel) who represented Dwayne Brooks, victim and best friend of the murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence. Winner of the Society of Asian Lawyers award 2011

#### Declan O’Callaghan

Immigration barrister from Landmark Chambers

#### Lord Thomas of Gresford QC

Queen’s Counsel (barrister) and Peer in the House of Lords



Patron Lord Low



New patron Louise Christian



New patron Jon Robins



Patron Diane Abbott MP



Patrons: Nicky Gavron AM, Jean Lambert MEP and Rajiv Menon QC



# STORIES OF THE YEAR

## March, April & May 2012 *continued*

### HCLC participates in 'Guardian Live Justice blogging' day

In April, Hackney Community Law Centre was delighted to take part in the Guardian newspaper's 'Live Justice' blogging experiment, where journalists tweeted live from courts across London. The point of this groundbreaking journalistic exercise was to try and demystify what goes on in our courtrooms to people who might not have had any experience of the courts system. On Wednesday 4th April, the Guardian's blog focused on housing. Our Senior Housing Solicitor Nathaniel Mathews was shadowed at Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court by Jon Robins, editor of the Justice Gap blog and one of HCLC's fantastic new patrons.

### London Legal walk 2012

On Monday May 21st 2012, Hackney Community Law Centre was extremely proud to participate in the 2012 London Legal Walk organised by the London Legal Support Trust. This year's walk saw more than six thousand people take part and more than £500,000 raised! Walkers raise hundreds of thousands of pounds for agencies who provide free legal advice to those in desperate need and who cannot afford to pay for services that assist, for example, young people in poverty, homeless people, trafficked women and children, those with mental illnesses and older or disabled people needing community care. In the past, the money raised has even helped to create new services in boroughs where none existed. HCLC's team raised just over £2,800.



'Walkers raise hundreds of thousands of pounds for agencies who provide free legal advice to those in desperate need and who cannot afford to pay for services...'

## FOCUS ON HOUSING

In 2012, we saw a 20 per cent increase in our caseload compared with 2011. The main areas of our work covered illegal evictions, homelessness and helping residents adjust to the cuts in housing benefit.

Illegal evictions doubled in the past year and have now become a social problem reaching a scale of epidemic proportions. The majority of tenants made homeless as a result are vulnerable people including refugees, homeless households and disabled people. We came across examples of harassment and violence towards tenants including a case of a refugee who was evicted with only 24 hours' notice and physically assaulted by an estate agent. By law, tenants must receive at least two weeks' notice – and, in many cases, one month. As well as helping victims of illegal evictions this year, we worked with Hackney Council to support tenants to resist such evictions. In October 2012, our senior solicitor Nathaniel Mathews hosted and delivered a workshop for local tenants and landlords to increase awareness of basic housing rights and improve landlord behaviour. This attracted a huge turnout from local residents (and some landlords!).

The impact of housing benefit reforms and the transitional relief changes affecting tenants continue to generate a considerable amount of casework. In Hackney, over 40 per cent or more of those affected by the housing benefit changes are in work. A more recent development concerns the impact of the Localism Act where local authorities have started to discharge their homelessness duty by housing homeless households in private sector accommodation.

Further changes as a result of the government's welfare reform agenda and the introduction of Universal Credit from 2013 will hit the poorest and most vulnerable. HCLC believes that many people who rely on the benefits system are already bearing a disproportionate share of the government's deficit reduction programme.

Finally, these changes arrive at a time when advice services are being cut as part of the legal aid reforms which take effect from 2013. The Law Centre is currently working hard with colleagues across the sector to mitigate the worst impact of these changes to ensure that we continue providing a sustainable service.

'Illegal evictions have doubled in the past year and have now become a social problem reaching a scale of epidemic proportions.'

### PAUL'S HOUSING TESTIMONIAL

"I was served a notice of eviction on the flat I'd lived in for seventeen years. Rent arrears had built up as my Housing Benefit had- wrongly- been suspended, something of which I was unaware. At that time I had some drug-related health issues, and I also spent a lot of time looking after my mum. I came to Hackney Community Law Centre for help, where Nathaniel, the senior housing solicitor, took on my case. He came to court with me and stopped the eviction. He also found out that the Benefits office were at fault, and got them to pay the Housing Benefit they owed me, so I could pay my rent. I could have been forced on to the street, but thanks to Hackney Community Law Centre, I kept my flat. Also, I'm now about to start a new job. I have a great deal of respect for Nathaniel, and know only too well from personal experience how important the Law Centre is to the people of our community".



### DAPHNE'S HOUSING TESTIMONIAL

"I have a 6 year old daughter who has mental health problems. We were renting one bedroom in the house of an intimidating landlord, who only allowed me to use the kitchen to cook once a week; often there was no heating or hot water. Most of the time my daughter went to bed without a hot meal, and for six months she was unable to bathe properly. The landlord's son constantly brought people to the house who drank, smoked, played loud music and swore at me. It was no way for human beings to live, and my daughter's problems got much worse; she often woke up crying. Hackney Community Law Centre made me feel listened to, and that someone was on my side. Val, the solicitor, gave up her lunchtime to listen to my story. She told me that as a British citizen with a British daughter I have rights. Thanks to her campaigning for me- that's the word I'd use- my daughter and I now have a new home where we can bathe properly and sleep peacefully at night. Now my daughter is like a new child".



# STORIES OF THE YEAR

## June & July 2012



### HCLC Launch 'Pop Up' Community Law Shops service

In June, Hackney Community Law Centre launched our new Community Law Shops service. In the first instance, the walk-in, 'pop-up' service operates between 2pm and 5pm every Monday at Hackney Central Library, kindly sponsored by the London Borough of Hackney and Matrix Chambers. At the Community Law Shop sessions Hackney residents see a qualified advisor about their housing, employment, immigration, welfare benefits and debt problems. No appointment is necessary.

Simon Bowen helps manage the pop-up shops every Monday at Hackney Central Library. Simon, who is pictured helping a client in the library, says: "I meet and greet clients at Hackney Law Shop, filling out a brief legal triage form with them before they see a solicitor. I've performed this role since we launched in June 2012. Having successfully sourced funding to support the Law Shop, it's very satisfying to see it in practice, helping local people with a wide range of legal matters that seriously affect their lives and well-being. I'm very proud to be part of a team that makes the Law Shop possible, and hope we're able to continue to meet people's needs in the challenging times to come".



### Turner Broadcasting help repaint HCLC office

Hackney Community Law Centre is extremely grateful to Turner Broadcasting for helping us begin repainting our offices, in order to make the Centre a more welcoming and pleasant environment for our clients and local community. In June 2012, a team of volunteers from Turner Broadcasting's London office spent the entire day at HCLC completely repainting the kitchen, our volunteers' room, all our bathrooms, clients' waiting reception area and all the other communal areas in the Law Centre. Turner Broadcasting has a strong Corporate Social Responsibility team and its staff are given special days



off to volunteer with charities and organisations in need. We are very grateful to Turner Broadcasting volunteers Andrew Lock, Steven Smith, Mandy Huxen and Alexia Parodi (pictured above) and Turner Broadcasting's Corporate Social Responsibility Director Nick Hart.



### Tony Robinson becomes a HCLC patron

We were delighted when high profile actor and television presenter Tony Robinson joined Hackney Community Law Centre as a Patron in June! Tony Robinson was born in Hackney at the Homerton Hospital and lived in Amhurst Road, near Hackney Downs in Lower Clapton. Among other professional successes, Tony starred in the BBC's popular Blackadder television programme as the well-known character 'Baldrick'. He currently presents the Time Team programme on Channel 4.

Commenting on why he accepted an invitation to become a HCLC patron, Tony Robinson said: "Being born and brought up in Hackney, I was very pleased to be asked to become a Patron of Hackney Community Law Centre. In these very difficult times, Hackney Community Law Centre provides an indispensable legal lifeline for people losing their jobs, under threat of eviction or living below the breadline. I am proud to support the work of Hackney Community Law Centre and all the other Law Centres around the UK currently fighting for survival".

"I am proud to support the work of Hackney Community Law Centre and all the other Law Centres around the UK currently fighting for survival."

### House of Lords Summer reception

Hackney Community Law Centre is very grateful to our Patron Lord Low of Dalston (pictured) for hosting our 2012 'Friends of HCLC' summer reception at the House of Lords. The reception saw people and organisations from all walks of life come together to celebrate the work of the Law Centre. All guests invited had a close and special connection to HCLC as clients, staff, interns, volunteers, sister Law Centres, patrons, donors, Hackney residents, friends and family, journalists or community organisations. We are also grateful to Debevoise and Plimpton LLP and Faegre Baker Daniels LLP for helping make the reception possible. See more photos from the event on pages 14 and 15!



### Justice Gap debate in the House of Commons

In July, Hackney Community Law Centre hosted a joint debate with the Justice Gap team in the House of Commons entitled 'Justice in the Community: do we get it?' The speakers were Diane Abbott MP, Lord Willy Bach, Matthew Ryder QC and Roger Smith, the Director of Justice. The debate was chaired by Jon Robins (pictured right centre), HCLC Patron and editor of the Justice Gap. The quote of the night came from Matthew Ryder QC who said: "The Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act is contrary to who we are as a nation. Publicly-funded law should rank in importance alongside the NHS, public housing and education".





## FOCUS ON WELFARE BENEFITS

The government's welfare reform agenda continues to be the main driver of the issues affecting the work of the unit. 2012 saw the implementation of the local housing allowance reforms which have capped state support for rent payments. This has forced many low-income families into having to find the money to make up the difference to cover their rents or face losing their homes.



From October 2013, the Universal Credit will come into effect and gradually replace many of the key benefits that are in place now, including Child and Working Tax Credit, Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support, Incapacity Benefit, Employment Support Allowance, Local Housing Allowance and Housing Benefit. It is anticipated that by 2017 all benefit claimants will be transferred to the new Universal Credit.

### Key features include:

- The structure is proposed to be a single basic personal amount, with additional amounts for things like caring, housing costs, and children.
- Transitional protection relief to minimise the impact of the change-over for claimants.
- Tapering, earnings will be taken into account at a single taper rate of 65 %
- Additional amounts will be paid to people with disabilities, similar to those already in place for the Employment Support Allowance.
- Housing Costs will be included in Universal Credit to help cover rent payments and mortgage interest payments. Housing Benefit currently delivered by local authorities will be taken over by the new system.

- Conditionality: the receipt of Universal Credit will have certain conditions attached. People will be divided into four broad groups and conditions applied to receipt of benefit. Full conditionality for job seekers; work preparation for people with health conditions and disabilities; keeping in touch with the labour market for lone parents and couples with young children.

The plans for Universal Credit also contain provisions for a 'Mandatory Work Activity' requirement. The plans mean that some claimants will be required to take part in full time work activity for four weeks or face a sanction. The sanction system may also be overhauled with hardship payments being replaced with loans. Some elements of the Social Fund system might be paid through Universal Credit. Another important point to make on the shift to the universal credit is that the government is also moving to localise the administration and payment levels of related benefits. From October 2013, local councils will be responsible for establishing local replacements for the social fund.

Together these changes represent a fundamental change in the shape of the welfare state since 1945. They also come at a time when welfare benefits advice is removed from the scope of legal aid funding from April 2013.

### JOHN'S WELFARE BENEFITS TESTIMONIAL

*"I work full-time and my wife works part-time. We have five children. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs informed us that for several years we had been overpaid on our Working Tax Credits. We didn't know how this could have happened, but when they challenged us in our own home we felt we had no option but to write out post-dated cheques for thousands of pounds we couldn't afford. We felt confused and were starting to panic: HMRC had begun cashing our cheques and we had no help or advice at all. Then we got in touch with Hackney Community Law Centre, who listened to us and decided to take on our case. Diane, one of their lawyers, wrote to HMRC and asked them to review the matter. As a result of this, the HMRC legal team investigated and eventually identified errors in the system which had caused the problem. We had never been overpaid. HMRC re-credited us the money we had given them, and our lives began to return to normal."*

*Without that help and advice I don't know what I would have done. I was going mad. Hackney Community Law Centre was friendly, helpful and made me feel at home. I like the way they work, and thanks to them, I can now sleep again at night."*

## INTERN AND VOLUNTEER Programme

In 2012, we relaunched our interns programme to create a more formalised and structured experience for our interns. Applicants now attend the Centre 4 days per week for a total of 12 weeks to assist the solicitors and caseworkers, attend court with clients, shadow at HCLC outreach sessions and take calls on the telephone Advice Line. Ideally, applicants will have completed their undergraduate degree in law (LLB), their Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), their Legal Practice Course (LPC) or their Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC).



### DANIELLE BROWN HCLC INTERN FROM THE USA

In May, HCLC was delighted to welcome Danielle Brown to the Centre as an overseas intern. Danielle Brown was a postgraduate law

student from the University of Richmond in Virginia on the east coast of the United States of America. Danielle spent a month with HCLC as a legal intern before travelling to Cambridge to participate in a special University of Cambridge programme for overseas law students. Danielle says she really enjoyed her HCLC placement, particularly working with the HCLC staff, adding, "Even though they are not really paid a lot, especially being solicitors, they put everything into their jobs."

### ADENIKE OJO FORMER INTERN TESTIMONIAL



*"I was inspired to volunteer at Hackney Community Law Centre as I'd worked in the corporate/commercial sector for several years and I wanted to take some time to give back to the community before returning to corporate law and also have an opportunity to sharpen the legal skills that I already gained. I worked on the telephone Advice Line taking calls from the general public about their legal problems and issues particularly housing, benefits and employment and staffed the face-to-face drop in clinic. I also worked on cases for my supervisors on Housing and Welfare matters and attended court to support them when needed. The highlight of volunteering at Hackney Community Law Centre was having the opportunity to work with supervisors who were passionate about their work and seeing a case progress which could potentially change an individual's life."*



### LORNA ANTONIO CHOICE IN HACKNEY VOLUNTEER

In September, HCLC welcomed new volunteer Lorna Antonio (pictured left) to the Law Centre. Lorna's placement with

HCLC was organised through the Choice in Hackney voluntary organisation, which provides Advocacy and Independent Living Services to disabled people in London. Lorna suffers from dyslexia, dyspraxia, and dicalculus but despite having to live with and manage these conditions, Lorna attended South Bank University to read for a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminology and was awarded a 2:1. Lorna has a 9 year old daughter and in her spare time she likes to cook, read and take her daughter out on excursions.

### MARY-RACHEL MCCABE FORMER INTERN TESTIMONIAL



*"I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to work with such talented and dedicated lawyers during my internship at Hackney Community Law Centre. The team's commitment to seeking justice for their clients - even in the face of drastic cuts - is nothing short of awe-inspiring and I offer my thanks to everyone at HCLC for all that they taught me."*

### THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR FANTASTIC 2012 INTERNS AND VOLUNTEERS:

Simon Bowen, Olga Bakeeva, Rachel Thomas, Elohor Emmanuella Okoro, Toyin Omatayo, Lisa Rothera, Liam Carmody, Adama N Wurie, Jennifer Jacquot, Alex Greaves, Mary Rachel McCabe, Adenike Ojo, Racquel Palomas-Rodriguez, Jasmin Begum, Lizette Robleto-Gonzalez, Senay Nihat, Marie Froya, Rachel Francis, Sameera Sheikh, Shabia Sikdar, Martin Young, Lorna Antonio, Danielle Brown, Annette Burke, Clare Hayes and Jorrit Donner-Wittkopf.



Interns Shabia Sikdar and Martin Young with patrons Lord Willy Bach and Jon Robins



# HOUSE OF LORDS SUMMER RECEPTION





# STORIES OF THE YEAR

## August, September & October 2012



Mind the Justice Gap Project's Peer Researchers Sam, Gockce and Terrence

### Mind the Justice Gap project begins

Over the summer, we joined forces with 'The Justice Gap' ([www.justicegap.com](http://www.justicegap.com)), the University College London's Faculty of Law and the Hackney Council of Voluntary Services to work on a major public legal education (PLE) project aimed at young people explaining legal rights and demystifying the law. The initiative (called Mind the Justice Gap) – is backed by human rights lawyer Michael Mansfield QC and the former shadow justice secretary Lord Willy Bach – and involves young people in Hackney working with University College London (UCL) law students overseen by lawyers at HCLC, the Hackney Council of Voluntary Services (HCVS) and the Justice Gap. We are proud to be taking part in the 'Mind the Justice Gap' project,' commented HCLC's manager Sean Canning. 'Our Law Centre has served the local community for nearly 40 years and assisting our local young people to reach their full potential is one of our key priorities. It will help give our young people more confidence to deal with the main legal hurdles they regularly face— be it stop and search, employment issues or housing.'

### HCLC runs Prevent Illegal Evictions training

In October, HCLC held a free one-day campaign and training workshop to raise awareness of the growing problem of illegal evictions in the last two years. Anecdotal evidence suggests the problem may have doubled over the last two years. The speakers at the workshop were Tom McCarthy, Shelter Campaigns Officer, who was spearheading Shelter's 'Rogue landlords' campaign; Kelechi Ibegbule, the Team Leader from the London Borough of Hackney's Advice and Options Department; James Bowen, barrister at Garden Court Chambers and Hackney resident; and Nathaniel Mathews from Hackney Community Law Centre. Commenting on the workshop, HCLC Senior Housing solicitor Nathaniel Mathews said: "People say that weddings and moving house are two of the most stressful times in a person's life. But being illegally evicted is one of the most stressful things that can happen to a person. Illegal eviction is an offence which is rarely prosecuted. This event is a national first, delivering training and bringing together local residents together with other agencies to look at how we can deal with this growing problem."



Paul Heron receiving his award from Lucy Scott-Moncrieff, President of the Law Society and Colin Wallace from Hiscox who sponsored the award



### Law Society Excellence Awards 2012

Following our shortlisting for two of the 2012 Law Society Excellence Awards, HCLC solicitor Paul Heron (pictured centre with Law Society President Lucy Scott-Moncrieff and award sponsor Colin Wallace from Hiscox) beat off stiff competition to win the 2012 'Solicitor of the year – in house' category! The Law Society Excellence Awards reward the most outstanding practitioners in the legal profession and are open to the entire legal sector, not just solicitors. HCLC was also shortlisted in the 'Excellence in Innovation' category following the launch of our Community Law Shops 'pop-up' advice service, which takes place every Monday between 2pm and 5pm in Hackney Central Library. The winners were announced by BBC broadcaster Mishal Husain at a special black-tie dinner and presentation ceremony in Old Billingsgate.



### LAW SOCIETY EXCELLENCE AWARD TESTIMONIAL SUBMITTED ABOUT PAUL...

*"When I was eight months pregnant with our first child, I moved into the house of my husband's family, here in Hackney. We had met in China, then got married, without their knowledge. Only one month after I had the baby, it was like I was their slave. They made me do all the cleaning, and locked me in the kitchen. They broke my things, and my father-in-law wanted to beat me- on one occasion using a mirror to do so. Eventually my husband threw me out, along with the baby. I went to the council, but they didn't accept I was homeless. I found a place in a hostel through a friend, though after a month there, the council said I wasn't 'at risk' and should return to my husband. I tried to tell them that this would be like a slow death, but it didn't make any difference. I felt suicidal. Someone at the council told me about Hackney Community Law Centre. Paul, a solicitor there, interviewed me, and wanted to know all the details. For the first time, I felt really supported. Thanks to his help and advice, I moved out of the hostel in 2011. The council have now accepted I'm a homeless victim of domestic violence, and found us some safe accommodation. My life was a nightmare: I was living on the streets, and nobody seemed to care. Now, everything has become normal. Thank you Paul, and thank you Hackney Community Law Centre!"*



## FOCUS ON DEBT

The impact of the current economic recession on households in Hackney continues to highlight the acute need for adequately funded debt advice. Many residents are excluded from mainstream financial services because of low income and are vulnerable to loan sharks who operate extortionate interest charges. This creates an ongoing cycle of debt as household budgets are stretched to meet the demands of servicing expensive loans.

In 2012, our Debt and Financial Inclusion services focussed specifically on helping the most vulnerable people in Hackney to address their money management arrangements in order to enable them to stabilise their finances and help them access mainstream financial services including banks and the credit union.

As part of its work, we focussed on income maximisation to increase disposable income and helping residents to negotiate repayments on priority debts such as rent ensuring that tenants are able to keep their home.

Following the LASPO changes the majority of debt advice will be removed from the scope of public funding from April 2013. This will put additional pressure on overstretched services such as those funded through the Financial Inclusion Fund.

We are therefore extremely grateful to BPP Law School, Debevoise and Plimpton LLP and Faegre Baker Daniels LLP for helping us to launch a new dedicated debt and consumer law 'POP-Up' service every Tuesday evening at Dalston CLR James Library. Staffed by lawyer and student volunteers, the pilot project launched in November and has been well received across the local community. In 2013, we hope to be able to continue and expand this desperately needed evening service.



**'Many residents are excluded from mainstream financial services because of low income and are vulnerable to loan sharks who operate extortionate interest charges.'**

## DONATIONS Report

**'All of the money donated to Hackney Community Law Centre is used only to help the many people who come to us for help and advice.'**

Hackney Community Law Centre is a charity (registered charity number 1016171). That means that we do not make any profits or bonuses from the work that we do. All of the money donated to Hackney Community Law Centre is used only to help the many people who come to us for help and advice. In the last year, primarily due to social and economic factors relating to the economic downturn, HCLC's caseload increased by around 40 per cent, close to 3,000 people used our services. Without your help and financial support, Hackney Community Law Centre would not be able to provide the services that it does.

**We are very grateful to the following people and organisations for their donations to the Law Centre in 2012:**

- The London Borough of Hackney
- London Councils
- The London Legal Support Trust
- Trust for London
- Lloyds TSB
- The Big Lottery
- Jon Worth ([www.techpolitics.eu](http://www.techpolitics.eu)) – for designing the [www.hclc.org.uk](http://www.hclc.org.uk) website pro bono
- Hackney Parochial Charities – for donating £916 towards new legal text books
- Matthew Howgate – for donating a camera to HCLC
- Matrix Chambers – for donating £3,500 towards the funding of interns for HCLC'S Community Law Shops
- Stephen Rathbone – for putting up new shelving for case files and text books
- Aidan O'Neill QC – for donating his book: *'EU Law for UK Lawyers'*
- Declan O'Callaghan – for donating the Legal Action Group book: *'Housing – an adviser's handbook'* by Diana Astin
- Turner Broadcasting – for repainting HCLC's offices, including providing all labour and materials free of charge
- Lynn Dalton and Matthew Sparkes from Linklaters – for donating two tickets to the Law Society Excellence Awards 2012
- The Legal Department at HCA International Ltd – for donating the Civil Court Practice 2011
- Louise Christian
- Sally Jeffery
- Ann Petruckevitch
- Kate Walmsley





# STORIES OF THE YEAR

## November & December 2012



Gavin Chesney Debevoise and Plimpton LLP and Rustam Sethna BPP Law school.



Rebecca Greenhalgh from Debevoise and Plimpton LLP and Stephen Llewellyn from Faegre Baker Daniels LLP with BPP student Charlotte Carrington



Diane Morrison qualifying

### Dalston Pop-Up! New Debt & Consumer Law Evening Advice Service launched!

As of November, HCLC began offering a new evening 'Pop-Up' Debt and Consumer Law advice service to people living and working in Hackney. Launched on November 6th, during National Pro Bono week, students and tutors from BPP Law School and major city law firms began giving high quality free legal service to people requiring help with consumer and debt problems. To access the service, people who live or work in Hackney must call 020 7633 4531 and leave their name and contact telephone number. It is hoped that HCLC will be able to obtain funding to continue offering the service long term.

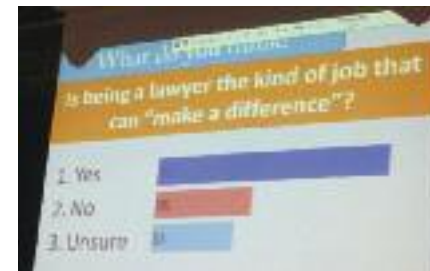
### A huge thank you to the lawyers and students who have volunteered with the Dalston Pop-Up so far:

Rebecca Greenhalgh, Gavin Chesney, Rustam Sethna, Whitney May, Mike Howe, Karen Antwi, Charlotte Carrington, Stephen Llewellyn, Laurence Hanesworth, Hayley Griffin, Sarah McLennan, Vikas Mehta, Theodore Cardos and Luke Baker. A huge thank you also and in particular to Rebecca Greenhalgh of Debevoise and Plimpton LLP and Stephen Llewellyn of Faegre Baker Daniels LLP, BPP tutors Laura Rowland, Jessica Austen and Diana Kirsch and the London Borough of Hackney's Library Service in particular managers Adrian Morris, Earl Bailey, Antony Kane, Michelle Gardner and security guard Dharminder Singh.

"I have watched with pleasure Diane grow in skill, confidence and professionalism over the years with us, and am very proud that she has qualified as a solicitor."

### Diane Morrison qualifies as a solicitor

In November, following the successful completion of her Legal Practice Course (LPC), Diane Morrison, who has worked at Hackney Community Law Centre as a generalist advisor and then a trainee solicitor, formally qualified as a solicitor. Diane Morrison joined the Law Centre as a typist in May 2005 (initially on a part time basis). She then qualified as a Generalist Adviser with the CAB (Holborn) on a part-time basis and became the Law Centre's main adviser alongside the specialist caseworkers. She still volunteers with the CAB. From 2009 onwards she started the Law Centre's volunteer programme. Diane's main experience has been in the social welfare law team – alongside supporting the volunteers with front level advice work and she also gives legal advice at HCLC's new Community Law Shops Pop-Up service every Monday in Hackney Central library. Ian Rathbone, Chair of HCLC, said: "I have watched with pleasure Diane grow in skill, confidence and professionalism over the years with us, and am very proud that she has qualified as a solicitor. We have helped to give her that opportunity to explore her potential and develop her expertise and knowledge and look forward to seeing her further grow as she helps us take on the difficult challenges of the years to come. She is an important part of what we do to help the people of Hackney".



### Lord Bach visits HCLC

In November, HCLC welcomed Lord Willy Bach and one of our fantastic patrons Jon Robins, editor of [www.thejusticegap.com](http://www.thejusticegap.com), to the Centre. Lord Bach, a former barrister, who has served as both Justice Minister in Government and Shadow Justice Minister in opposition, has been a staunch supporter and defender of Law Centres around the country. As well as leading the fight against the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) in the House of Lords, Lord Bach also serves as a patron of Coventry Law Centre.

'...to encourage an understanding that the law can make a positive contribution to their lives (as opposed to reinforcing a sense that "the law" is something to come into conflict with)'



### 'Mind the Justice Gap' project goes to Mossbourne Academy

Also in November, 'Mind the Justice Gap' our joint Public Legal Education Project in partnership with the Justice Gap, the University College London's Faculty of Law and the Hackney Council of Voluntary Services, visited local school Mossbourne Academy to participate in a special assembly for its Year 10 students. The aims of the Mind the Justice Gap project are threefold: to explain to young people key concepts about the law that will help in their day-to-day lives; to encourage an understanding that the law can make a positive contribution to their lives (as opposed to reinforcing a sense that "the law" is something to come into conflict with); and to encourage the view that a career as a lawyer is one that is available to people whatever their background. We were very grateful to Lord Willy Bach for attending the assembly to observe and participate!





# IN THE News

Media wise, 2012 was also a very exciting year for Hackney Community Law Centre. We increased our presence on twitter and Facebook significantly as part of our core strategy to reach out to more people who may not have had contact with HCLC previously. From starting off with 5 twitter 'followers' at the beginning of 2012, we were delighted that @friendsofhclc ended the year with over 800 followers from all walks of life. We also had a number of positive stories reported in the local, regional and national press about our work and campaigns. We are particularly grateful to our patron the journalist, Jon Robins, for writing stories about HCLC's work that were published in The Guardian. On the new website, our 'Chair's Blog' proved a popular new addition as Ian Rathbone, our Chair, commented on stories of the day. Senior Housing Solicitor Nat Mathews' 'Frontline Hackney' blog (<http://frontlinehackney.blogspot.co.uk/>) also continued to be well received. On the facing page is a blog entitled 'Sugar' Nat wrote in June:



## Mother and disabled son win nine-year deportation battle

Home Office backs down after repeated efforts to force disabled man in out. We couldn't have done it without Hackney Community Law Centre.

By Jamie Elliott

A disabled man and his mother have won a nine-year battle to prevent the man being deported from the UK. The man, who is disabled and has a learning disability, was granted permanent residence in the UK after a long legal battle.



## Hackney Law Centre gets new patrons

A charity which provides free legal advice and representation to Hackney residents unveiled a host of high-profile patrons last month (Thursday 16 March), reports William Turvill.

## Top law firm helps charity to set up its own advice shops

Donation to enable more people to get access to free help

By Nicky May

A major donation from a top law firm has helped Hackney Community Law Centre to set up its own advice shops. The donation will enable the charity to provide free legal advice and representation to more people in the community.



## Warning over rise in illegal evictions

Ben Papworth

A law centre has cited an incident in which a refugee was beaten up and on just 24 hours owing number of legal evictions to the borough over

## Free advice for homeless

A Hackney law charity has launched a new legal advice service for young victims of homelessness or threatened

## Free online legal advice

Residents needing free legal advice on homelessness, debt and discrimination can visit Hackney Community Law Centre's (HCLC) new website. With a revamped "how we can help you" section, the site also offers events information and advertisements as well as local and national news.

Sean Canning, manager of HCLC in Lower Clapton Road, said: "People will be able to quickly identify what the law centre can do for them and how their legal

## Legal advice for tenants

Hackney Community Law Centre (HCLC) is to host a session to raise awareness of illegal evictions. Residents can learn what

## Pop up advice shop to offer free legal help

16 to 24 free specialist Hackney Centre how to such as homeless, or

## Legal centre gains backers among the great and good

A charity which gives free legal advice and representation to vulnerable Hackney residents has unveiled its first patrons.

The Hackney Community Law Centre (HCLC), which is



Hackney Gazette, Thursday May 10

## Lawyers face charity walk

Lawyers and community workers from Hackney Community Law Centre will be taking part in a charity walk to raise money for the centre. The walk will be held on Thursday 10 May.

## How a lucky break and a cunning plan led to a TV career for Hackney boy made good Tony

Backstage star is ready to help law centre

By Nicky May



## 'SUGAR' FROM NAT MATHEWS' BLOG: <http://frontlinehackney.blogspot.co.uk>

Paulie was born in Jamaica, but he has been living here since 1970. He came when he was a teenager to join his parents, aunts and uncles, who had arrived in the UK in the early 50's. They were of the generation that came here on the good ship Windrush from the West Indies, to work as porters, clean toilets, do the work that we native born Britons did not wish to.

Now he is in danger of losing his home.

His parents, aunts, cousins, siblings have long since managed to obtain British passports. Some have gone back to the islands, some have settled across London and beyond. They have worked, paid their dues, somehow survived the prejudice that met them on their arrival, when it was common for boarding houses to post signs saying "No blacks, no dogs, no Irish", then the backlash of the Notting Hill riots.

Paulie lost his passport in the 1980's. He has worked as a hospital porter, a builder, a jack of all trades for almost forty years. He's at an age when he should be thinking about retirement. And yes, he's paid his tax and national insurance.

In the clampdown on foreigners without verifiable documentation Paulie lost his Job Seekers Allowance three years ago. Incredibly, he still signs on every two weeks, attends work focused interviews, tries to get a job. Sadly, his absence of immigration papers are likely to have the same effect on potential employers, frightened of fines, as on the Department of Work and Pensions. Basically, nobody is prepared to stick their neck out and accept that Paulie has a right of abode in the UK. Unless all the paperwork's in order and apple pie it's more than their job's worth.

Sadly, the Border Agency has lost most of its documentation prior to 1986, when they computerised. In most other cases, it's too much trouble to look.

With less than two weeks to prepare for the Tribunal dealing with his Housing Benefit appeal, my heart sinks. He is two years in rent arrears. It is notoriously difficult to obtain documentation that will satisfy the UK Border Agency that a person has been present continuously for 14 years and should be granted Indefinite Leave to Remain (and anyway once granted that would confirm benefits entitlements going forwards, and would not resolve the issue of his present entitlements).

The fateful day arrives, and my best bet is that we will get an adjournment to gather evidence that has long since disappeared, that we will find ourselves in a paper chase for employee records that have long since been shredded, for employers that may no longer exist. A vista of rolling adjournments beckons.

Then a miracle.

The Judge believes Paulie, and shoots the Council's refusal decision out of the air on grounds that are so technical that it makes my head spin. She goes on to point out that, if the Council rephrases the refusal thus and so, Paulie will find himself in the same pickle once again.

Then another miracle. The Council is convinced that Paulie is exactly who he says he is. They will pay up for some two years in Housing Benefit. He will not lose his home.

Who deserves the credit for this signal victory? As a lawyer, I should be blowing my own trumpet.

In truth the credit lies with Des, the income collection officer for Paulie's landlord who fought City Hall every step of the way, when the culture is increasingly to evict, write off the arrears and start again. It lies with Judge, who spotted a technicality where I had not. It lies with the humane Council official, who looked Paulie in the eye, believed him, and chose not to do him dirty by changing a line or two in another letter and send him back on the appeal merry-go-round.

In truth, the credit lies in loving kindness.

Yet let me say this. In April 2013 the guillotine comes down on Legal Aid. There will be no funding for Paulie to straighten out his immigration papers, for the State has passed seamlessly from the proposition that the application system should be efficient and humane to the conclusion that there is therefore no need for lawyers. It is unlikely that funding will be in place for any of the work that we did today, or the work that Paulie needs tomorrow.

Paulie offers me a gobstopper. It's bad for my teeth, but I accept. Sometimes you need to taste the sugar.



# FINANCIAL Report

## HACKNEY COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES for the year ended 31 March 2012

		Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	2012 Total funds	2011 Total funds
	Notes	£	£	£	£
<b>Incoming Resources</b>					
Incoming resources from generated funds					
Voluntary income	2	2,232	916	3,148	5,122
Investment income	3	40	0	40	112
<b>Incoming resources from charitable activities</b>	4				
Provision of legal services and advice		558,281	23,898	582,179	552,794
<b>Total incoming resources</b>		<b>560,553</b>	<b>24,814</b>	<b>585,367</b>	558,028
<b>RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>					
<b>Charitable activities</b>	5				
Provision of legal services and advice		543,755	28,205	571,960	537,158
Governance costs	6	4,100	0	4,100	4,000
<b>Total resources expended</b>		<b>547,855</b>	<b>28,205</b>	<b>576,060</b>	541,158
<b>NET INCOMING (OUTGOING)</b>		<b>12,698</b>	<b>(3,391)</b>	<b>9,307</b>	16,870
<b>RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS</b>					
Total funds brought forward		<b>91,240</b>	<b>5,528</b>	<b>102,768</b>	85,898
<b>TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD</b>		<b>103,938</b>	<b>2,137</b>	<b>112,075</b>	102,768

		Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	2012 Total funds	2011 Total funds
	Notes				
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>					
Tangible assets	10	6,356	0	6,356	8,474
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>					
Work in Progress		195,773	0	195,773	114,589
Debtors	11	15,516	0	15,516	22,382
Cash at bank and in hand		2	12,137	12,139	12,634
		<b>211,291</b>	<b>12,137</b>	<b>223,428</b>	149,605
<b>CREDITORS</b>					
Amounts falling due within one year	12	(107,709)	(10,000)	(117,709)	(55,311)
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS</b>		<b>103,582</b>	<b>2,137</b>	<b>105,719</b>	94,294
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		<b>109,938</b>	<b>2,137</b>	<b>112,075</b>	102,768
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		<b>109,938</b>	<b>2,137</b>	<b>112,075</b>	102,768
<b>FUNDS</b>					
Unrestricted Funds				<b>109,938</b>	97,240
Restricted Funds				<b>2,137</b>	5,528
<b>TOTAL FUNDS</b>				<b>112,075</b>	102,768

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small charitable companies and the Financial Reporting Standard for Smaller Entities (effective April 2008). These financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees on 21 November 2012 and were signed on its behalf by I. Rathbone, Trustee.

# STAFF AND TRUSTEES

## HACKNEY COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE Staff List November 2012

Staff Member	Job Title	Date joined	Date left
Cherrill Connerty	Legal Secretary	01.11.07	-
Chorouk El-Adib	Trainee Solicitor	1.07.11	31.12.12
Diane Morrison	Solicitor	03.05.09	-
Hilton von Herbert	Caseworker	01.04.09	-
Hope Olugbola	Debt Worker	06.11.06	-
Bella Donnelly	Administrator	16.01.96	-
Kim Sin	Receptionist	01.08.10	-
Margaret Crowley	Trainee Solicitor	01.07.11	31.12.12
Miranda Grell	Development Officer	03.01.12	-
Nathaniel Matthews	Solicitor	07.09.94	-
Olu Adenuga	Finance Worker	19.09.04	31.12.12
Paul Heron	Solicitor	24.11.09	-
Sean Canning	Manager (p/t)	12.12.11	-
Val Thomas	Legal Executive	01.11.10	-
Wendy Pettifer	Solicitor	01.02.10	-

## Board of Directors in 2012

Directors	
Ian Rathbone	(Chair)
Megan Redmond	(Vice Chair)
Matthew Howgate	(Treasurer)
Cllr Deniz Oguzkanli	
Lawrence Abe	
Ruth Appleton	
Alhaji Sesay	
Millie Xavier	

HCLC Solicitor Diane Morrison and HCLC Debt caseworker Hope Olugbola train student and lawyer volunteers for HCLC's new Debt and Consumer Law Evening Service, Dalston POP-Up

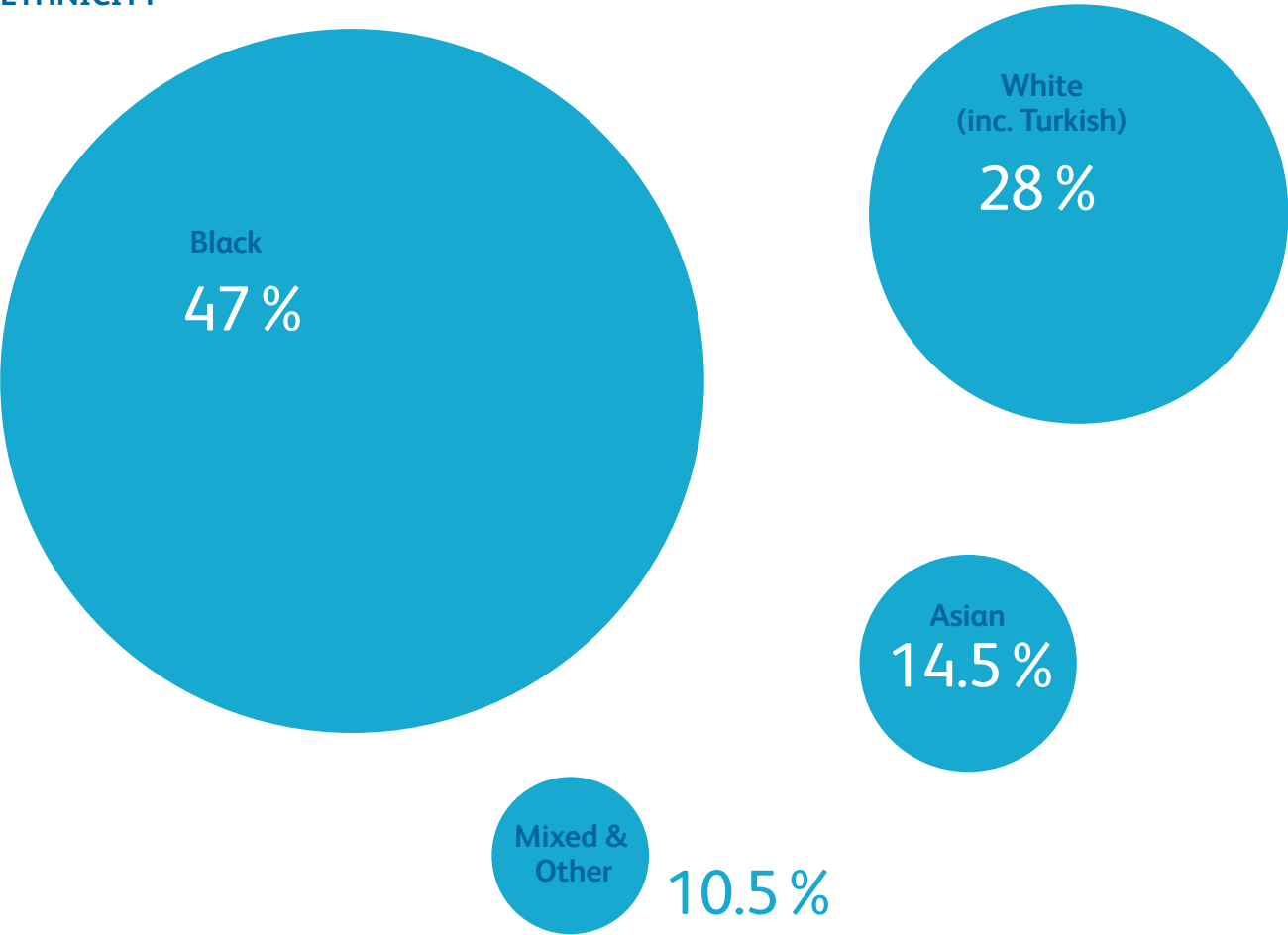




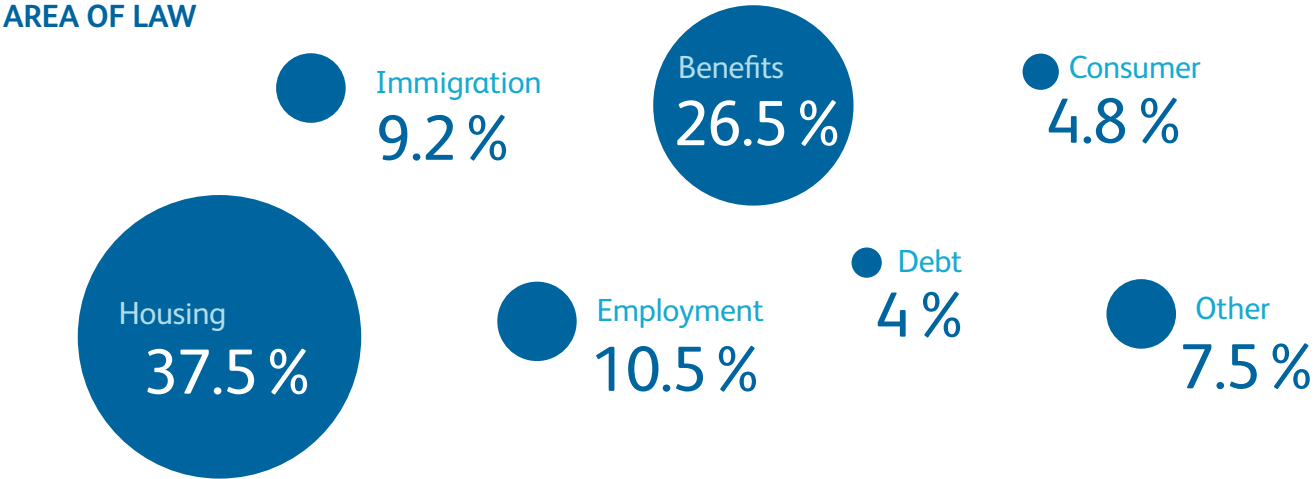
# STATISTICS

HACKNEY COMMUNITY LAW SHOPS 'POP-UP' ADVICE SERVICE  
June to December 2012

## ETHNICITY



## AREA OF LAW



24 % had a disability

