Hackney Community Law Centre

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

MAKING JUSTICE ACCESSIBLE TO THE PEOPLE OF HACKNEY



CONTENT'S

3 Chair's Report

5 Manager's Report

6 Snapshot Service Statistics

8 Delbert's Story

10 Rickford's Story

12 Sharon's Story

14 Stewart's Story

16 Hackney Community Law Centre in the news 2018/19

18 HCLC's Team in 2018/19 Staff, Board, Interns & Volunteers

Friends of HCLC 2018/19 & Pro Bono Report/Funders

19 Financial Report

Cover illustration: Liz Woodroffe/Silhouette people Vecteezy.com

Fighting challenges and hardships with energy and commitment

Since we reported last year the Law Centre continues to face the same challenges and hardships confronting Hackney residents – ongoing welfare reform and the roll-out of universal credit, a housing crisis caused by a lack of government investment in affordable homes for ordinary people and increasing homelessness.

Our EU citizens and migrant communities continue to experience ongoing anxiety and uncertainty as a result of the Brexit chaos which has fuelled an increasingly intemperate and hostile environment. It is during times of acute social stress and political upheaval that the values and principles of the Law Centre become essential as a means of articulating and representing those without a voice who are most at risk and who face severe challenges.

The daily grind of poverty and austerity has significantly added to the hardship experienced by children and families in the borough. In-work poverty, debt and financial exclusion has grown in the borough in recent years and underlies many of the cases and queries we deal with in the organisation. Rent arrears and debt have affected people's ability to deal with financial emergencies. This has generated an additional need for access to proper face to face advice services.

Our local county court in Clerkenwell and Shoreditch is a barometer of the hardships experienced by Hackney residents. A sense of desperation pervades the majority of proceedings as District Judges decide on 'who must stay and who must go, and will live to fight another day'.

The problems of homelessness and the lack of affordable housing are particularly acute. The borough has seen a quantum leap in house prices by 82% in the last 5 years while rent levels in the private sector have risen by almost two thirds since 2011. Hackney Council reports that they have nearly 3,000 homeless families living in temporary accommodation. Lack of affordable accommodation has prompted many local authorities including Hackney to search for solutions outside their area. This year the Law Centre successfully intervened to support a single mother who was seven months pregnant and fleeing an abusive relationship who had been faced with a choice of accepting a move to Staffordshire or become intentionally homeless.

Earlier this year the Government announced its intention to abolish 'no fault' evictions. This news is welcome and comes against a background of rising concern about the increase in evictions by private landlords in the last decade using the section 21 procedure under the Housing Act 1988. Hackney's Homelessness Strategy highlights that the loss of a private tenancy through the 'no fault' procedure is one of the main reasons for homelessness among those cases accepted as homeless.

As ever, HCLC's success is down to the energy, commitment and professionalism of all our staff and volunteers. Sadly this year we said goodbye to a number of colleagues- Miranda Grell, Sonia Lenegan, Angharad Monk and Eleanor Kyle. We were particularly sad to lose one of our longest serving staff members, Bella Donnelly, who retired earlier this year after more than twenty years of loyal service.

I am also pleased to welcome on board Beri Nwosu and Beya Rivers. And thanks to all the existing team for continuing to take on all the challenges of our work, expertly overseen by Sean Canning, our manager, who has persevered through some very choppy waters of fundraising this last year.

Nat Mathews, has continued to lead as senior solicitor, train others, and generally help us keep on the road - and give us all an invaluable if shocking



insight into life on the legal frontline through his blog.

I would like to thank the board of trustees for their support during the year and particularly Alice Holt, Ian Browne and Tom Stoate who joined during the year. Victor McAllister has continued to be a pillar of wisdom as Treasurer.

I would also like to thank all our funders and patrons for their support and interest in our work, particularly Hackney Council, Trust for London and West Hackney Parochial Charities. Also thanks to all those who went on Hackney's first Legal Walk to raise funds for Hackney's advice services on September 28. A special thanks goes to Rosemary Sales, board member of the Hackney Migrant Centre, who organised together with the London Legal Support Trust.

Notwithstanding the challenges ahead, the organisation continues to thrive, largely due to the dedication and expertise of the staff.

Finally, we hope for better times for all those who look to the justice system for relief, for all those who need help from our welfare system.

IAN RATHBONE, Chair



ELEANOR KYLE & JAMILLE MOHAMMED AT THE HOUSING DUTY SCHEME, CLERKENWELL & SHOREDITCH COUNTY COURT

Advice services continue to operate in a rapidly changing environment.

The pressures on funders and funding are such that we are constantly having to justify the need to support our work. We were pleased to secure a new grant from the National Lottery Fund for three years to support our housing and benefits service.

Regrettably, our enthusiasm was tempered by the announcement that our funding from Hackney Council would be reduced by 20 per cent for this year, 2019-20 only while a cut of 44% awaits us in 2020-21. We think this will prove a short-sighted move in the context of the considerable legal work we carry out which is necessary for people to get access to justice, but which cannot be funded by the legal aid scheme.

This has necessitated a restructure of the organisation and the loss of some staff posts. The reduction in funding has impacted significantly upon our core funding and the need to secure new funding streams.

Access to justice remains at the core of the daily work of a law centre. The impact of legal aid cuts continues to impact disproportionately on organisations providing social welfare advice services.

Earlier this year the government's post LASPO review, *Post Implementation Review of Part 1 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO)* highlighted that whilst demand for advice services has increased since LASPO was introduced, the pressures arising from reduced funding has forced many providers to either close or withdraw from the market.

Law Centres have struggled across the UK in the face of these pressures while legal aid deserts continue to grow around the country. We are determined to continue to ensure that Hackney residents are able to access high quality advice services across the borough.

Among our achievements have been the following:

- Our award winning innovative community pop up clinics have continued to help local residents, working in collaboration with our volunteers and partners at Debevoise and Plimpton, Faegre Baker Daniels and the BPP Law School. We are very grateful for all the pro bono help given by our partners and others.

- Our volunteer intern programme continues to provide much needed opportunities for people to develop their skills as well as help increase access for service users.

- Helping more than 3000 people during the year. Sometimes with lengthy cases and detailed work.



Where do we go from here?

In alliance with our partners, we will continue to respond innovatively to develop new services which will help us tackle the impact of growing poverty and help people exercise their legal rights to improve their quality of life.

SEAN CANNING, Manager

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES HACKNEY COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE MAKE?

80%

OF OUR CASEWORK IS FOCUSSED ON HELPING PEOPLE WITH BENEFIT PROBLEMS, TACKLING DEBT, PREVENTING EVICTIONS, ADDRESSING IN-WORK POVERTY AND ASSISTING CLIENTS WITH NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS.

IN HACKNEY HOUSE PRICES HAVE LEAPT BY **82%** IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

WHILE RENT LEVELS IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR HAVE INCREASED BY TWO THIRDS SINCE 2011.

OUR APPROACH IS TO IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS AND SUPPORT CLIENTS TO BUILD RESILIENCE TO ENABLE THEM TO MANAGE PROBLEMS IN THE FUTURE.

OUR FINANCIAL GAINS FOR CLIENTS ACROSS ALL OUR KEY AREAS OF BENEFITS, HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT EXCEED OVER

£1 MILLION PER YEAR

WE PREVENT OVER

200

PEOPLE

EACH YEAR FROM EVICTION.

WE WORK WITH THE MOST

VULNERABLE

CLIENTS TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM

FREE EMPLOYMENT ADVICE

REPRESENTATION TO PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES AND HELPING PEOPLE AT RISK OF IN WORK EXPLOITATION

WE PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT TO VICTIMS OF

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

ENSURING THAT THEY HAVE ACCESS TO ADVICE COVERING

PEOPLE ACCESSING OUR SERVICE IN 2019

2,890

HCLC MAKING COMMUNITIES SAFER

OUR IMMIGRATION TEAM WORKS TO TACKLE THE

EFFECTS OF TRAFFICKING

BY SEEKING HOME OFFICE PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN STATUS FOR VICTIMS.

CALLS TO GENERAL TELEPHONE ADVICE 1,088



Photo: Liz Woodroffe

DELBERT'S STORY

I came to the UK in 1969. I grew up here and I thought well everything here is just normal. Until, all of a sudden, you got no papers and nobody knows who you are. I can't explain this right now, it's so emotional, what I've been through because of Windrush. The nights I spent on the streets. Homelessness. It's a wicked thing. It's a wicked thing.

When I came to the Law Centre I needed help with benefits. I wasn't well and the doctor recommended me to come to the Law Centre and while that was happening I became homeless. I came to the Law Centre and they help me with the Council, but because of my status I never had any papers, so this goes back to Windrush. It all goes back to the status. I can't rent nowhere and if you don't live nowhere you can't work.

When I came to the Law Centre they looked into my records that was here and remember that we have been doing this since 2010-11. And straight away that was it. My application for citizenship was successful, thanks to the Law Centre.



Photo: Liz Woodroffe

RICKFORD'S STORY

I was on the road…and I usually go in the evenings or stay the night at Victoria station. They have facilities…you know …a bath where you can clean up. I was going there for at least a year or eighteen months when this thing happened. One morning- a Saturday morning- I couldn't breathe…ended up at the hospital. The guy said you have a serious case of pneumonia.

Well I started to cry because when I was six years old this thing had killed my mother.

I had a social worker who came in and asked "where do you live?" and I said: "no place of abode". "What's your address?" I said: "no place of abode". I was advised to come to the Hackney Community Law Centre. I needed help in every direction but immigration was the most important because if you don't have that settled…then you're still searching. Immigration and housing, I think they go together…you know hand in hand…you gotta eat, you gotta live… you gotta live somewhere.

I came in and put it this way. I expected to get this job. I didn't get it. I overstayed because at that time I was fit. When I came here in '91 I was about 53. Today I am 82. When I explained it took some time as I had been here for over twenty years. Then the immigration people refused me and we appealed. At the tribunal I explained to the judge and he said he was gonna grant it. He said he had never did this before.

Hackney Community Law Centre changed my life. When I came to them I was absolutely on the carpet, crawling and they took off the carpet and today I am standing…like a human being feeling I have been accepted into this world. I look forward and look out the window with a little bit more confidence because I can see tomorrow before it arrives.



Photo: Liz Woodroffe

SHARON'S STORY

My son's now 19, but he moved out of my house when he was 11 to go and live with his dad. The housing benefit department got in touch with me basically deducting housing benefit, stating that my son was still living with me when he wasn't there. I had informed all the various departments. I had informed child benefit, working tax credit and housing benefit and council tax. But it seemed for some reason they didn't pick up on it.

It got quite stressful because you just don't know what is gonna happen with your housing, whether your gonna be kicked out and it's one of those things, where you know it's not your fault... You've done everything by the book as you're meant to do and obviously along the line, something's been missed out on their part.

I went to the Hackney Community Law Centre...they went through all my paperwork with me, realised it was an error on the part of the council and then they put a plan in action to get the arrears recovered. Not only did they reinstate my money, they realised I had been overpaying my council tax as well. So now I have nothing to pay until the end of this year, so all of that got sorted, just from this case here. To be honest, I think if it wasn't for the Law Centre, I'd probably be evicted.



Photo: Liz Woodroffe

STEWART'S STORY

Crohn's disease came into my life around '99. I was completely messed up. I had my entire abdomen opened up. I have had an aneurysm and a brain haemorrhage. I have moments where I lose all consciousness. It just got worse, and worse, and worse. It meant that what I used to do, I couldn't do, so I couldn't work anymore. I couldn't go out and earn as I used to and so my life changed.

And what was available to me was help from the Department of Work and Pensions, where you get benefits. One day I got a letter and, they just stopped it. And I didn't know why- there was no real explanation. So, I did what you do, which was, you know, investigate. I followed everything to the letter and they just stopped me everywhere.

Hackney Community Law Centre, in my opinion, was absolutely, entirely the force behind me getting to explain my condition and what they (the DWP) did to me. It was worded just in the language that tribunals speak.

They said if I would like to leave the room and "we'll call you back shortly". I remember that. And you know what that's like, you know, I have just spent a whole year- I've not thought about anything else apart from this. Went back in, she said, "you don't even need to sit down". So what she did, she put it back as it was, and she said "and we're going to give you an extra year".

What the Law Centre did was explain to me how it works and I am forever grateful to the Hackney Law Centre for what it's done for me. Changed everything.

HACKNEY COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE

THROUGHOUT 2018-19

May, 2018

London Legal Walk

Hackney staff and volunteers celebrate the London Legal Walk, May 2018.





June, 2018

Law Centres successfully challenge the Ministry of Justice

In June 2018 the High Court upheld a judicial review challenge led by the Law Centres Network against the Ministry of Justice's reform proposals to reduce the number of county court duty schemes funded by the Legal Aid Agency. The reforms, which threatened to consolidate existing schemes into larger schemes covering wider geographical areas, would have impacted significantly upon those most at risk of losing their home.

"Law Centre staff build up a good working relationship with the local court staff and members of the judiciary, often over many years, and the work that they do is much appreciated by those working within the courts and tribunals in which they appear." Mrs Justice Andrews, DBE, The Queen on the application of the Law Centres Network v The Lord Chancellor [26 June 2018]90s.

August, 2018

County Court Duty Scheme

Jamille Mohammed, with clients at the Clerkenwell & Shoreditch County Court duty scheme and below Kevin Long, housing solicitor, attends.







Consumer and Debt Clinic

Volunteers from BBP Law School and Faegre Baker Daniels helping at the consumer and debt clinic in Dalston.



May, 2019

NYC Students visit HCLC

Students from Syracuse University, New York visiting HCLC.



July, 2019

Hackney Council approves reduction in annual funding to the Law Centre

@HackneyLawCentre, a pillar of strength for residents, is facing swingeing cuts. Is it the victim of its own success? asks the local media http://bit.ly/2Ud4vw1 #Hackney #law #cuts

Access to Justice matters!

"I know how intimidating the civil and family courts can be for people without legal knowledge or help. Everyone deserves access to justice whether or not they can afford a lawyer." Lady Hale, President of the Supreme Court.



Community law centre could close after town hall slashes its funding

SAM GELDER

A law centre offering free legal advice on housing, immigration and discrimination says it could close next year after almost half its grant funding was cut by the council.

Hackney Community Law Centre is a charity employing solicitors and paralegals to help people going through legal issues who cannot afford their own lawyers.

It is regarded as one of the leading law centres in the country – but on Tuesday night the council's cabinet approved a potentially devastating cut of 45 per cent.

Over the next two years it will receive £115,000, down from £303,000, bringing the total cuts to the centre since 2017 to £148,340.

The centre says it will also have to consider cutting its immigration department, just as Brexit looms, and losing staff from its housing legal advice team – at a time they are needed more than ever.

The centre recently helped 62-year-old Delbert Myrie Clarke, part of the Windrush generation, challenge the Home Office over his citizenship after a four-year ordeal.

The board of trustees has blamed the new policy that dishes out the council's voluntary and community sector advice grants pot across more groups.

The town hall says the new approach is needed as public services evolve to deal with complex social problems, but the centre argues it has left "possibly unqualified" groups being given cash.

"We know austerity has impacted all our services but this is a deliberate and unconsulted sudden change of policy of redistribution of the grants pot," said Cllr Denis Oguzkanli, on behalf of the board.

"It has also left Hackney Citizens Advice Bureau reeling from a major cut, whilst other untried and possibly unqualified groups have been given significant sums."

Manager Sean Canning said he was surprised national organisations such as Shelter and receiving funding "at the expense of local organisations".

He said: "Advice agencies are very dependent on council funding and in the past Hackney has been very supportive."

Hackney's voluntary sector chief Cllr Caroline Selman said: "While some organisations have been allocated a smaller share of grant funding, the recommended combination of providers will result in a service that better meets the needs of residents."

Manager Sean Canning.



October –December, 2018

Securing citizenship for the Windrush generation

In December 2018 Law Centres were sponsored by the Guardian Xmas appeal 2018. The appeal focussed on supporting charities who played a pivotal role in challenging and highlighting the hardship and destitution and injustices experienced by families of the Windrush generation as a result of the Government's hostile environment policy. Hackney Community Law Centre was successful in helping to secure citizenship for individuals who suffered as a result of this policy.



January –March, 2019

Form filling clinic at Dalston library

Volunteers Sabeeka and Simeon who had heard about our work and wanted to see more of what we do, help out at the form filling clinic at Dalston library. This service is so needed for those facing the complicated world of bureaucracy.



February, 2019

Early Legal Advice

Mark McDonald-Lonke, Trainee Solicitor, talks about the importance of early legal advice, which stops people falling into destitution, where they become unable to solve things for themselves. Below, Mark, pictured at pop-up clinic at the Pembury Community Centre, February 2019.



HCLC'S TEAM IN 2018/19: STAFF, BOARD, INTERNS & VOLUNTEERS

STAFF MEMBER	POSITION
Marcin Brajta	Welfare Benefits Caseworker/Trainee Solicitor
Sean Canning	Manager
Bella Donnelly	Administrator (resigned 24.01.19)
Miranda Grell	Development (resigned Mar-19)
Eleanor Kyle	Paralegal (01.11.18-29.08.19)
Sonia Lenegan	Solicitor (resigned Sep-18)
Kevin Long	Solicitor
Nathaniel Mathews	Solicitor
Mark McDonald-Lonke	Trainee Solicitor (appointed 15.01.18)
Jamille Mohammed	Solicitor
Angharad Monk	Paralegal (02.10.17-31.07.19)
Diane Morrison	Solicitor
Beri Nwosu Solicitor	(appointed 22.10.18)
Jeremy Ogilvie-Harris	Welfare Benefits Caseworker (appointed 01.07.19)
Benedicto Orellana	Cleaner
Caroline Ott	Immigration Caseworker (01.07.18-30.09.18)
Beya Rivers	Immigration Caseworker/Trainee Solicitor (appointed 17.09.18)
Kim Sin	Triage Worker

HCLC BOARD MEMBERS 2018-19

Ian Browne (appointed 04.12.17)
Alice Holt (appointed 04.07.17)
Victor McAllister
Cllr Deniz Oguzkanli
Adenike Ojo
Ian Rathbone
Tom Stoate (appointed 04.12.17)
Andrew Wingfield


Treasurer, Victor McAllister



(Above) Hackney Community Law Centre staff and trustees joined Mayor Phil Glanville and Cllr Kam Adams Speaker of Hackney to support the inaugural Hackney Legal Walk 2019.

(Below) Samira and Magdalena help out at the form filling clinic at Dalston library.

FRIENDS OF HACKNEY COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE & DONATIONS

We are grateful to the following Friends of HCLC for their continuing support:

- Louise Christian
- Sophie Earnshaw
- Matthew Feelihy
- Sally Jeffrey
- Julia Hayns
- Andrew Lock
- Alice Pillar
- Vivienne Gay
- Ann Petruckevitch
- Matthew Smerdon

And to our patrons including Meg Hillier MP and Diane Abbot MP.

We are grateful to the following people and organisations for their donations to the Law Centre in 2018 and 2019:

- Faegre Baker Daniels Foundation
- Lachlan Armour


Bella Donnelly retires after 20 years

PRO BONO REPORT & FUNDERS

We would like to thank all volunteers of HCLC's Dalston debt and consumer advice and the Disability Benefits Form Filling Clinics



Particular thanks go to the following:

- Emma Rehal-Wilde-Pro Bono Manager, Debevoise and Plimpton LLP
- Laura Richards-Senior Supervising Solicitor at BPP law School
- Laura Jones- Solicitor and Pro Bono Manager, BPP Law School
- Stephen Llewellyn, Counsel, Faegre Baker Daniels LLP
- London Borough of Hackney Library Services

FINANCIAL REPORT

Hackney Community Law Centre Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 March 2019

	Notes	Unrestricted Funds	Designated Funds	Restricted Funds	2019 Total Funds	2018 Total Funds
INCOMING RESOURCES						
Incoming Resources from generated funds						
Donations and legacies	2	**6,869**	**0**	**0**	**6,869**	12,315
Incoming resources from charitable activities	4					
Provision of legal services and advice		**463,367**	**0**	**54,558**	**517,925**	524,555
Investment Income	3	**107**	**0**	**0**	**107**	32
Total incoming resources		**470,343**	**0**	**54,558**	**524,901**	**536,902**
RESOURCES EXPENDED						
Raising funds	5	**1,836**	**0**	**0**	**1,836**	3,482
Charitable activities	6					
Provision of legal services and advice		**439,664**	**0**	**70,058**	**509,722**	491,194
Total resources expended		**441,500**	**0**	**70,058**	**511,558**	**494,676**
NET INCOMING/(OUTGOING) RESOURCES		**28,843**	**0**	**-15,500**	**13,343**	42,226
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS						
Total funds brought forward		**126,526**	**200,000**	**34,790**	**361,316**	319,090
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD		**155,369**	**200,000**	**19,290**	**374,659**	**361,316**

	Notes	Unrestricted Funds	Designated Funds	Restricted Funds	2018 Total Funds	2017 Total Funds
FIXED ASSETS						
Tangible assets	11	**4,882**	**0**	**0**	**4,882**	3,668
CURRENT ASSETS						
Work in progress	12	**99,331**	**0**	**0**	**99,331**	115,609
Debtors	13	**33,643**	**0**	**0**	**33,643**	75,666
Cash at bank and in hand		**33,520**	**200,000**	**19,290**	**252,810**	199,879
		166,494	**200,000**	**19,290**	**385,784**	391,154
CREDITORS						
Amounts falling due within one year	14	**-16,007**	**0**	**0**	**-16,007**	-33,506
NET CURRENT ASSETS		**150,487**	**200,000**	**19,290**	**369,777**	357,648
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		**155,369**	**200,000**	**19,290**	**374,659**	361,316
NET ASSETS		**155,369**	**200,000**	**19,290**	**374,659**	**361,316**
FUNDS	15					
Unrestricted funds					**355,369**	326,526
Restricted funds					**19,290**	34,790
TOTAL FUNDS					**374,659**	**361,316**

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. The financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees on 30 September 2019 and were signed on its behalf by: V McAllister, Treasurer

Hackney Community Law Centre

Registered Charity No. 1016171

www.hclc.org.uk

Hackney Community Law Centre
8 Lower Clapton Road
London E5 0PD

DX 35465 Hackney 1
T 020 8985 5236
F 020 8533 2018
E admin@hclc.org.uk

Telephone advice line:
020 8985 8364

Designed by: Liz Woodroffe
Email: info@ew-design.co.uk