

50 years of legal services to the community 1976 - 2026



Austerity, Brexit & Social Change

“JUSTICE SHOULD NOT DEPEND ON WEALTH, STATUS, OR POSTCODE. FIFTY YEARS FROM NOW, LAW CENTRES SHOULD BE JUDGED NOT BY HOW MANY CRISES THEY RESPOND TO, BUT BY HOW MANY THEY HELP PREVENT.”

GROWING INEQUALITY

The period from 2011 to 2026 was shaped by austerity, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis. Government spending cuts affected local services and welfare provision, while rising housing costs, homelessness, and food bank use contributed to growing inequality. Key events included the 2011 riots in major cities, and the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. Debates around immigration, national identity, and social cohesion became increasingly prominent, alongside concerns about the influence of concentrated media ownership on public opinion.

2011-12

AWARD-WINNING LEGAL SUPPORT

The Centre emerged from a period of financial instability and staff shortages to rebuild and expand its services. Sean Canning was appointed as the new manager, new advisers were recruited, and more than 100 new cases were opened each month. The Centre successfully navigated funding challenges to expand services and develop volunteer and intern programmes. Nearly 3,000 residents received advice through face-to-face and telephone services. It launched the Community 'Pop Up Shop' at Hackney Central Library, helping over 300 residents. Housing issues increased by 20%, with illegal evictions doubling and becoming a growing social concern. Events included a summer reception at the House of Lords, hosted by Lord Low, and the Justice Gap debate. Paul Heron, HCLC solicitor, won the Law Society's 'Solicitor of the Year - In House' award.

2014

RESILIENCE AND RECOGNITION

HCLC helped more than 3,000 people through face-to-face, telephone, email and outreach services. The Centre led the Big Lottery-funded Sustainable Advice in Hackney partnership, bringing local organisations together to strengthen services through training, innovation and community engagement. Community Pop-Up clinics assisted over 1,400 residents. The year also brought national recognition, with Diane Morrison winning the Law Society's 'In-house Solicitor of the Year' award and Miranda Grell receiving the Reita Clarke Memorial Award. Volunteers, interns and partner organisations continued to play a vital role in extending HCLC's reach and impact.

2016-19

JUSTICE IN AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY

Brexit, the 2017 snap general election and ongoing austerity increased hardship for many residents, particularly EU citizens and low-income families, while placing greater pressure on advice services. Homelessness in Hackney reached a 12-year high, driven in part by rising 'section 21' evictions. In 2017, we welcomed Sir Henry Brooke former Lord Justice of Appeal and Phil Glanville Mayor of Hackney to HCLC to talk to us about our work. In 2018, the High Court upheld a judicial review led by the Law Centres Network against Ministry of Justice proposals to reduce legal aid-funded county court duty schemes. HCLC also successfully challenged unfair DWP benefit decisions and developed initiatives such as the Law for Good hackathon and digital advice summits.

During the 2018 Windrush scandal, HCLC supported affected clients like Delbert, helping those without documentation prove residency and access justice; in his case, this led to securing British citizenship after years of homelessness and exclusion.

CASE STUDIES

ABENA AMA WINS NINE-YEAR IMMIGRATION BATTLE

For nine years, Abena Ama and her son Kwasi, who has autism and mental health difficulties, faced the threat of deportation to Ghana. Concerned that Kwasi would not receive the specialist care and support he needed, Abena endured years of uncertainty and unsuccessful legal representation. Hackney Community Law Centre took on the case in 2009 and, after three years of advocacy, secured a successful appeal in 2012. The outcome gave Abena and Kwasi the stability and security they had been seeking for nearly a decade.

ILLEGAL EVICTION

A case in April 2014 shows the scale and urgency of the challenges faced by residents in Hackney. Fifteen Colombian tenants living in a House in Multiple Occupation in Lower Clapton were evicted without proper notice following a complex legal dispute and an error in court paperwork. The eviction was escalated to High Court enforcement, leaving the tenants homeless overnight. HCLC acted immediately, with Solicitor Nathaniel Mathews, assisted by intern Ervin Gjoleka, taking instructions in Spanish and securing an urgent High Court injunction late that night allowing the tenants to re-enter the property. Further court action corrected the order and prevented immediate eviction. The case ultimately resulted in compensation being paid to the tenants, enabling them to find alternative accommodation, and highlighted issues of unsafe housing, migrant exploitation, and the critical importance of rapid legal intervention.

2011-26

2013

AWARDS AND ADVOCACY

Despite the widespread legal aid cuts introduced by LASPO in April 2013, the Centre adapted by strengthening partnerships, securing additional funding. April 2013, launched a housing advice service in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. HCLC received national recognition for its work: Senior Immigration Caseworker Hilton von Herbert won the Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year Award, while the Dalston Pop-Up debt advice service received both a Halsbury Legal Award and the LawWorks Pro Bono Award for Best Partnership in Pro Bono. The year also saw HCLC host a landmark Youth Debate at London City Hall, bringing young people from across Hackney together with policymakers to discuss stop-and-search, rights and justice, and helping to amplify youth voices in civic life.

2015

COMMUNITY IMPACT & LANDMARK WINS

Housing and homelessness remained central to HCLC's work in 2015. Solicitor Nathaniel Mathews and intern Onika Phillip-Adams attended Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court, where the absence of a duty solicitor left vulnerable tenants without representation. They stepped in to assist throughout the day, representing clients in multiple hearings and successfully preventing 10 of 11 evictions. The year also saw a landmark Supreme Court victory in *Haile v Waltham Forest*, where HCLC client Ms Saba Haile successfully appealed a finding of intentional homelessness. HCLC Patron Diawhich was held in June. HCLC is In December, HCLC and Hackney Migrant Centre published 'A Place to Call Home', a report on the standard of accommodation provided to children in need in London.

2020-26

RESPONDING TO NEW CHALLENGES

HCLC adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic by introducing hybrid working, ensuring uninterrupted services while expanding remote access to advice. Our new challenges include rising demand, funding pressures, recruitment and retention of specialist staff, and digital exclusion affecting some clients' access to services.

A LASTING LEGACY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

As we celebrate the Law Centre movement, we also remember colleagues whose lives embodied its values. Nathaniel Mathews (2022), Pip Salvador-Jones (2026) and Wendy Pettifer (2025) each dedicated their careers to advancing social justice, supporting people facing poverty, discrimination and exclusion. Nat was a champion of housing rights and access to justice; Pip spent nearly four decades ensuring marginalised communities could exercise their rights; and Wendy combined legal expertise with activism for homeless people, migrants and refugees.

