



the first 40 years

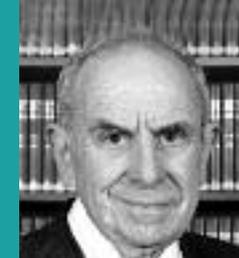
annual review 2013-2014

www.islingtonlaw.org.uk



Registered charity number 268468

Welcome from our Patron



For the past 40 years Islington Law Centre has played a central role in providing access to justice for the local community. It is able, with the help of dedicated volunteers, to provide essential specialist advice and other legal services in areas of law which are often complex and impenetrable. And because it is in daily contact with the whole range of legal problems affecting the community, it is able to put issues in their wider context.

At a time when other routes to justice are being closed off, the services provided by the Law Centre have never been so essential. It can look back with pride in the last 40 years, from which it has gained the experience and confidence to tackle the future.

On behalf of Islington Law Centre, welcome to our Annual Review for 2013-2014.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'H. Hoffmann'.

The Rt Hon. the Lord Hoffmann

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From the Chair



ILC lies at the heart of access to justice in Islington. It has played a key role in the last 40 years and we very much hope that will continue to do so for next 40 years.

Specialist help is vital – often complex areas of law are involved and there is a need to put issues in the wider context of what is happening to communities, which ILC is uniquely placed to do.

I have personally been involved in ILC for many years, firstly as a volunteer and now as Chair. In my day role as a housing lawyer, every day I see the need for accessible, independent help for local people and the immense need for services such as ILC.

A big thank you to all of the staff and volunteers for all of their hard work throughout the year. Their activities have helped to transform the prospects of so many clients - something they themselves often feed back to ILC.

Thank you also to our patron and to my fellow trustees for the time and commitment they have given over the year. All of them of course give their valuable time as volunteers for the charity and our projects and services benefit greatly from their wide ranging skills.

Although there are many challenges ahead, we face the future with some very strong partnerships, a skilled group of Trustees and very committed group of staff and volunteers.

We have worked hard to ensure that potential clients know what we do and how to find us, and have been active in promoting our projects. We were delighted that our PROTECT project was shortlisted by The Lawyer for their Ethical initiative award in summer 13, and our work has been covered by both the local press (Islington Tribune and Gazette), as well as the specialist press (Law Gazette and Solicitors Journal). ILC was also recently featured by the Guardian Online.

The work that is done at the law centre now builds on the immense contribution made by people throughout the law centre's history. The first 40 years has been marked by tremendous challenges and achievements. We face the next 40 years with confidence that we have the people and projects that can continue to make a very positive impact.

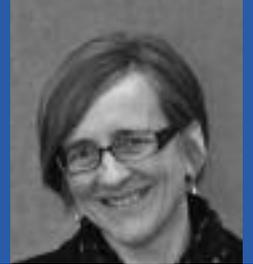
Thank you to everyone who has helped to build the organisation; for the commitment to access to justice and to the dedication to our client groups. We very much hope that the organisation will continue to hold true to these values and to tackle injustice in the decades to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jemima Joll'.

Jemima Joll



Centre Director's Report



These are times of very rapid change, and in the past few years, we have been coping with the impact of a changing economic climate, and a fundamental shift in the way in which public services are targeted and delivered.

Our client group has been at the sharp end of this – not only in terms of welfare reform, but issues such as zero hours contracts, a rise in in-work poverty, increased pressure on the housing stock, and threats to the commitment to an inclusive, diverse community. Huge cuts to civil legal aid have meant that it is increasingly difficult for people to ensure that their basic legal rights are protected.

Islington has high levels of poverty, contrary to its public image. A recent report produced by nef for the Cripplegate Foundation called "Distant Neighbours" revealed that:

- * Of the 40,000 children and young people who live in Islington, 34% live in poverty. This is the 4th highest rate in England and the second highest in London
- Around 12,500 Islington residents claim sickness benefits, or 8% of the working age population.

Against this background ILC has continued to offer high quality, personalised services that help our clients achieve real improvements to their situations. This includes supporting well over one thousand new clients during the year as well as providing telephone advice and outreach sessions.

With the support of our funders and partners, we are delighted that we can celebrate 40 years of work from our wonderful new offices, and during the last year ILC has launched a range of innovative and exciting projects. As circumstances change, the Law Centre has been developing new ways of working and new partnerships.

Central to the Law Centre's values is a commitment to justice and we look forward to continuing to support our local community, and our key client groups, for a long time to come.

It is a real privilege to have been part of ILC's team over the last 12 years and to be Centre Director at the point where we celebrate 40 years of our work. We have achieved many of the goals that we set ourselves in the last 5 years – we have maintained and developed services, we have strengthened the support for casework staff and we have moved to a great new building which means that at last we can offer our clients a relaxing and secure environment in which to talk with us.

However, this is a critical time for advice provision. We have seen Legal Aid removed in many areas of law and severely restricted in others. We are extremely grateful to Islington Council and to our Trust and Foundation funders, as well as to all those individuals and firms who have made donations to support our work and we know that we face even more difficult times ahead.

We are very proud that we have been able to undertake a huge range of individual casework, to play an important role within our local community and to make a significant impact on wider policy and practice.

We are not complacent, and are committed to ensuring that we continue to change and develop to meet needs in innovative and creative ways so that we have even more to celebrate at our 50th birthday!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruth Hayes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ruth Hayes

Partnerships

Director, Ruth Hayes, Lord Hoffman, Cllr Catherine West and Islington North MP, Jeremy Corbyn attending the opening of ILC's new base in Devonia Road in 2013



ILC is actively involved in a wide range of partnerships. These help us make sure that people know about and can access our services, increase our capacity to respond and also ensure that we are picking up on new issues and devising innovative solutions to emerging needs.

Collaborative work also delivers more holistic services to clients, and ensures that valuable resources are targeted as effectively as possible. Over the past 40 years, we have worked with a huge range of groups, and, whilst it is not possible to name them all, thank you to everyone who has worked with us.

We would particularly like to highlight our joint work with our Islington Advice Alliance partners - Islington People's Rights and Islington CAB, and to thank the agencies who host our outreach sessions. We currently have a programme delivering 17 outreach sessions each week, and the venues very generously make their space and staff time available.

We are proud to work within the Islington Community Network, the Law Centres Network and a range of specialist groups, and are delighted that we have secured new funding from the Big Lottery Fund to strengthen our links through the "Advising Islington Together" project.

Reception and Referral



Our reception and referral team provides a vital service. They assist people in identifying what the nature of their legal issue is and which agency might be most appropriate for assistance if we are not able to help directly.

A number of people find it hard to read official documents and the team can help explain what a letter means and what next steps need to be taken. They can make initial phone calls to allow time for the client to get specialist help and can make appointments for people to see an advisor.

Some people turn to the Law Centre in desperation, when they have no income, or nowhere to sleep that night and the team will always try to make sure that people have a level of basic support in place.

Our aim is always to ensure that people who contact us are helped to take the next step to resolve their issue, whether that is via an ILC service or one of our partner agencies.

Consumer and LawWorks

The Law Centre works in conjunction with LawWorks (formerly the Solicitors Pro Bono Unit) to offer three free evening advice sessions per week (Monday to Wednesday). These are staffed by volunteer lawyers from City law firms, who provide advice, assistance with drafting and help in following court procedures. We can assist with small claims, disputed debts, utility company issues and return of deposits.

The services are by appointment, and all clients receive a written summary of the advice given and the next steps to be taken. A number of the volunteers take on additional research, act as peer supporters to colleagues and some will even provide representation for the client. The service meets a real gap for clients and the volunteers' time is hugely appreciated.



Debt



The Law Centre has two full-time staff working in the debt team, and currently delivers three outreach sessions a week. The unit can assist with everything from basic advice on priority debts, through to debt relief orders and bankruptcy.

We know that many people are finding it particularly hard to manage at the moment, and it may only take a period of illness, a relationship breakdown, or redundancy for a situation to turn from being manageable to unmanageable. This can lead to harassment from creditors, and fear of the bailiffs coming into the home.

It is vital that people managing on low incomes are not forced to pay out more money than necessary on interest charges and debt repayment. We offer an independent, non-judgemental service to support people to ensure that they have a realistic way of meeting their outgoings and that they do not needlessly lose their home.

"It's all too easy to fall into debt. I never thought it could happen to me, but it did! Before I knew where I was I was threatened with losing my home. The Law Centre helped me get through this situation. They went through all of my debts and negotiated an affordable repayment plan. They have given me the confidence to move forward with my life and I feel like I can breathe again!"

Education

Our education work is headed by a full time supervisor, with part time support from one of our solicitors. We offer a range of assistance, including advice on admission to school, admissions appeals, special educational needs, bullying, risk of exclusion and exclusion.

We also take on cases relating to further and higher education, including access to student finance. For many families, problems at school can have a very serious impact, and all children and young people should have the best possible opportunity to learn and to develop their potential.

With effect from April 13, there has been no legal aid for education issues except those relating to special educational needs, which is accessed via a telephone gateway. We are able to continue to assist Islington residents, thanks to our grant from the council, and we help people to access the telephone gateway where appropriate.



Employment



Our employment team comprises two full time solicitors, and we are able to offer initial advice, specialist casework and sometimes representation. Our caseload includes issues relating to terms and conditions, disciplinary and grievance procedures, TUPE, redundancy, discrimination and dismissal. The Employment unit continues to be a service that offers help to those who need it most and which undertakes complex casework for clients who would otherwise be excluded from the legal justice system.

Legal aid was removed for all employment matters except for discrimination with effect from 1 April 13. We are pleased that, thanks to our grant from Islington Council, we are still able to offer assistance to Islington residents, and we can assist people in accessing the legal aid provision for discrimination via the telephone gateway.

Housing

Housing is a major issue in Islington – private sector rents are very high, and there is huge demand for social housing. Despite the Council having a programme of council home building, there is not yet enough to meet needs. Additionally, homelessness in London is rising.

Our housing team currently comprises 3 full-time solicitors and a caseworker specialising in work with young people. We offer 6 housing outreach sessions each week - 3 at the Council's housing offices and 3 in community venues. Additionally, we co-ordinate the duty desk scheme at the Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Courts.

We assist people with a range of housing issues - allocation, disrepair, overcrowding, possession proceedings, evictions and homelessness. We act for tenants across the public and private sectors, and are pleased to have developed links with the new Islington Private Sector tenants group.



Immigration and Asylum



Islington has a proud history of welcoming new communities from all over the world, and is a diverse borough. Immigration and asylum law can affect people who were born in the UK, those who have been educated here and worked here for many years, and those who meet a partner from abroad, as well as people who come to the UK to study, work and join their families.

In April 2013, immigration law was taken out of the scope of legal aid, except in specific circumstances relating to domestic violence and trafficking. This is a huge loss as it affects not only access to a solicitor but also to interpreters and to specialist reports which might be crucial to a case.

Our community based immigration and asylum team comprises 2 full time and one part time solicitor and a full time caseworker. In conjunction with our colleagues at Hackney Migrant Centre, we offer a weekly outreach advice session, and we are also able to offer some casework to Islington residents via our grant from the council.

We are currently seeking additional resources to meet need in this area, as we have seen demand rise considerably since the cuts to legal aid, and there are few other sources of specialist help.

Case Study

Mrs M is from Colombia and had been given leave to remain in the UK. She was subjected to domestic violence and became depressed and isolated. With the support of social services she left her husband but had no entitlements to benefits or housing and had sole care of her baby daughter. ILC persuaded the Council to house Mrs M and her daughter whilst an application was made for her to be granted permanent residence as a victim of domestic violence. Evidence was secured from the police, social services, her GP and others. Her application for permanent residence was successful, she is now learning English and looking forward to a more positive future.



Welfare Benefits



Our welfare benefits team now comprises 2 full time supervisors and 3 part time caseworkers, with locum support. Our services are accessed via outreach and we currently run 7 outreach sessions per week – 4 at the Council’s offices and 3 in community venues. We also offer a form filling clinic each week to assist people who need help in making initial claims.

We offer assistance with the full range of welfare benefits, at all levels from form filling through to representation at Tribunal and appeals to the upper Tribunal.

We are very grateful to Islington Giving and to Islington Council for providing additional funding this year to enable us to continue to meet demand for representation at tribunal, as well as to deliver a proactive strategy in relation to welfare reform.

We have developed packs and fact sheets and have delivered a large number of training sessions and talks to community groups, to ensure that people benefitted from the transitional protection available and that people understood the implications of the multiple changes coming through.

As part of our “Advising Islington Together” project, we will be developing and delivering a programme of ‘welfare benefit first aiders’ in the borough and working with other groups to extend the form filling scheme.

Case Study

Mr P is epileptic and relies on his wife who is his full time carer. His claim for disability living allowance had been refused and Islington Law Centre represented him at an appeal hearing. His welfare benefits caseworker secured medical evidence showing how frequent his seizures were and submitted evidence based on case law supporting the need for care and supervision for people suffering seizures resulting in a loss of consciousness. His appeal was won and Mr P was awarded disability living allowance.



Islington Law Centre is a London Living Wage employer

Special Units & Projects



The Law Centre currently has 4 specialist projects working with specific client groups

Migrants Law Project

The Migrants Law Project is a legal and public legal education project, which aims to promote fair treatment and access to justice for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, using public law. We provide free legal advice and support to organisations working with this client group and aim to enable those organisations, through advice and training, to negotiate more effectively with the government and other public bodies. Where negotiation fails, the MLP will take legal action, where appropriate, to challenge unjust government policies. Two solicitors work exclusively on this project and further information is available via the MLP website themigrantslawproject.org



Street Legal

Street Legal is a service for young people up to the age of 25 who are either homeless or at risk of becoming so. It aims to prevent homelessness and to secure safe accommodation for young people who are roofless. We work closely with referring agencies such as colleges and youth projects and many of the young people that we work with cannot live with their parents due to concerns about their wellbeing.

Some are living in extremely precarious situations where they are vulnerable to exploitation, and we work with the individual young person and other appropriate agencies until they have safe and settled accommodation. We can also assist with benefits and debt issues for young people. The project has a full time case worker and a part time youth advocacy worker.

Migrant and Refugee Children's Legal Unit

MiCLU is a specialist unit based within Islington Law Centre. MiCLU has a nationwide remit to affect policy change and collaborates with both national and grassroots organisations based all over the country. Through its mix of strategic litigation, consultancy and legal education work, MiCLU seeks to achieve social justice by changing policy and practice to ensure respect for the rights, and improve the lives, of migrant and refugee children in the UK. More details on the website miclu.org



PROTECT

This is our newest specialist project and works with undocumented young people up to the age of 30. PROTECT is an innovative new project providing a holistic or “wrap-around” legal advice service specially geared to the needs of young migrants. They are helped to understand their legal status and get specialist support so that their welfare needs are met and they can make informed decisions about their future. The service brings together our expertise in housing, education and immigration and asylum law. We were very pleased that PROTECT was shortlisted by The Lawyer for their Ethical Initiatives award in 2013.



Outreach Services

Over the last few years the Law Centre has developed real expertise in the development and delivery of high quality outreach services. These enable us to assist people who would not be able to get to the Law Centre and who may face barriers in accessing services. We are hugely grateful to the agencies who host the sessions – they are very generous with their space and their time.

Independent Advice Project

Funded by Islington Council, this project provides 7 outreach sessions a week in local housing offices, offering welfare benefits and housing assistance. The focus is on preventing possession proceedings and evictions, and has a strong track record – since it began in October 2005, £2,296,367 has been secured for tenants, reducing rental arrears and ensuring that families can retain their homes.

Three Advice Projects

The Three Advice Projects deliver 9 outreach sessions each week in community venues. The initiative is funded by the Cripplegate Foundation and Richard Cloudesley Charity. The venues are located in three parts of the borough which face particular economic disadvantage – Finsbury Park, Essex Road and South Islington/Caledonian Road. Residents can get help in three areas of law – housing, debt and welfare benefits. The project has been running since January 2012.

Hackney Migrant Centre

We are pleased to have been able to extend our work with Hackney Migrant Centre over the year and now provide a weekly outreach session for them. The service offers immigration and asylum advice and we are able to take on a number of cases arising out of the advice surgeries. Hackney Migrant Centre provide a very valuable source of support to people who may have very few other services open to them.



New Initiatives

The Law Centre seeks to be imaginative and creative in its approach to service design and delivery and to ensure that it continues to respond effectively to changing needs and opportunities. We are delighted to be able to develop the following new pieces of work over the coming period:-

Advising Islington Together

This is an exciting new Big Lottery funded project which we are leading. The project will strengthen advice partnerships within the borough and develop new ways of working together. One of the early successes is the development of the welfare benefits Advice First Aider programme. This will be training 100 people per year in the borough to offer initial help and signposting and is supported by a range of specially developed materials.

We will also be launching a new advice workers forum, as well as a wide range of other activities.

A key strand of the work will be helping us improve the ways in which we can measure what we are doing and the impact that it has and we have developed a new cloud based solution to assist with this. This will inform 3 new pieces of local research and the redesign of services.

Further information is available from the project website www.advisingislingtogether.org.uk



Non-UK Rough Sleepers Project

This is a new piece of action research, delivered jointly with Asylum Aid, and with funding from the London Housing Foundation. We have been delivering training in key aspects of immigration and asylum law to frontline organisations supporting homeless people and are now taking on a number of individual cases. The project will be helping frontline teams to be confident in understanding how the law might apply to their service users and will also provide some evidence base about the underlying issues impacting on the rising issue of non-UK rough sleepers.



Green Roots – ILC's community law firm

The Law Centre has been working for some time on a brand new concept – a wholly owned community interest company, providing services on a non-profit basis to clients who can no longer access legal aid. We will be launching this shortly and will offer immigration, employment and education law from offices near Finsbury Park.

The aim of the social enterprise is both to meet a real need for a quality service at a reasonable price, and also to help ILC to become more sustainable by enabling staff expertise to be utilised via both agencies, increasing flexibility and reducing overheads.

For further details see www.facebook.com/greenrootslaw

People



ILC benefits hugely from the commitment, skills and expertise of a wide number of people, including staff, trustees, volunteers and pro bono supporters. As part of our commitment to tackling in-work poverty and to supporting young people into education, training and employment we are proud that this year we have been granted London Living Wage accreditation and have appointed our first ever apprentice.

Patron We were delighted that Lord Hoffman was appointed as our first ever patron in 2013, and kindly attended the launch of our new offices.

Management Committee During the year, the management committee has gone from strength to strength – we have recruited and inducted a number of new members, have held a strategic planning away day, and are implementing new terms of reference and a new sub-committee structure. Members during 2012-2013 were Onika Adams, Angela Bennett, Lindsay Edkins, Helen Farr, Patrick Holden, Jemima Joll, Susan Lee, Jelena Madir, Pete Mant, Peter McCormack, Trevor Mistlin, Marina Sergides and Amelia Sleat

Staff Those who have contributed to ILC's work in 2012-2013 include: Suresh Agoramoorthy, Oby Akhigbe, Elaine Atkins, Eunice Bellot, Carol Blakemore, Megan Booth, Kim Brookes, Holly Buick, Hannah Chambers, Reza Choudhury, Nicola Cockburn, Katie Commons, Carly Ladyman, Anoushka Fernandes-Vidal, Suzanne Fraser, Stephane Gentili, Penny Gentles-Choudhury, Sonal Ghelani, Adina Goga, Jane Goldring, Julie Gray, Agnete Gribkowski, Ruth Hayes, Joyce Hilditch, Emma Hughes, Claire Jephcott, Karen Jones, Kevin Jones, Shola Joseph, Barbara King, Heather Labanya, Mara Lacey, Sheeba Levi-Stewart, Helen Martyn, Raj Mehta, Fiona Mogre, Alison Moore, Waleke Munthali, Nkem Odei, Joe O'Malley, Maureen Orji, Roisin Overton, Surendra Patel, Lorna Reid, Daniel Sills, Baljeet Sandhu, Jessica Saverimuttu, Aniko Shabani, Shila Shah, Helen Sheldon, Anna Skehan, Tom Southenden, Roopa Tanna, Habtom Tesfay, Laura Tucker and Amy Woods

Volunteers The law centre could not exist without the support of our wonderful teams of volunteers. We have a range of volunteering opportunities, ranging from short term work experience for local students through to dedicated volunteers who have been with us for many years.

"It has been an informative, interesting, stimulating and rewarding experience volunteering at the Centre. I have enjoyed the range of tasks that I have undertaken during my time here, and I am very grateful for the friendliness and helpfulness of the people at the Centre. Other than benefitting myself, I hope that I have been useful to everyone involved."

Day time volunteers assist with clients coming into reception, help with archiving and providing support to individual solicitors and caseworkers. Volunteers this year have included individual volunteers as well as those from BPP Law School

Pro Bono evening sessions Our evening volunteers attend to provide face to face help to local people at our regular "LawWorks" advice sessions. We are immensely grateful to volunteer lawyers from CMS Cameron McKenna LLP, Mayer Brown International LLP, Slaughter and May Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP Kemp Little LLP and Dechert LLP who enable us to offer 3 evening advice sessions a week.

Pro Bono Support Many solicitors and barristers provide assistance on individual cases and projects on a pro bono basis and this makes an great difference to the outcomes that we can achieve. Particular thanks are due to Slaughter and May, CMS Cameron McKenna LLP, Decherts LLP, Hogan Lovells International LLP, Nabarro, Allen and Overy, White & Case LLP, Berwin Leighton Paisner and Mayer Brown International LLP

In addition to client facing work, ILC receives pro bono support to assist its own work. In particular, we would like to thank Slaughter and May for a huge amount of work in relation to our move; Hogan Lovells for helping us turn our aspiration to set up a social enterprise Green Roots into a reality; Freshfields for help in working with ATLEU (Anti Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit) and other firms for their donations and project support.

Thank you

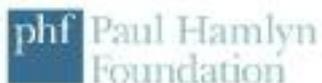
We are immensely grateful to all those who fund our work - ranging from Islington Council, who are our largest single funder, to individuals who make much appreciated one off donations. Many of our funders also provide their time and expertise to ensure that our services can best meet the needs of the most disadvantaged. They connect us with other agencies working in the field and give us additional opportunities to contribute to social policy work.

Current grant funders include;



Cripplegate Foundation

Richard Cloudesley's Charity



ILC is fortunate to have good relationships with our two local MPs, Jeremy Corbyn and Emily Thornberry. They have both taken a real interest in our work, and have been active in defending their constituents access to legal aid. Both have spoken at public meetings that we have organised as well as other events. We receive referrals from their offices on behalf of local residents and appreciate the work that they do on individuals cases.



ILC's Director, Ruth Hayes and Islington South & Finsbury MP and Shadow Attorney General Emily Thornberry

Finally, a special thank you to **Islington Council** in the year for their assistance. We had outgrown our previous offices and were not able to offer clients the interview facilities they needed. The council has been very helpful in helping us find our new offices and facilitating the process of the move. We are now able to provide a much better environment for our service users. The Council have taken a keen interest in access to legal aid and have helped ensure that there is a strong local network of advice providers.

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