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## Background Information about the Law Centre

## Islington Law Centre was founded over 40 years ago, and offers high quality rights based advice, assistance and legal representation to people living, working or studying in England and Wales but in particular the London Borough of Islington and beyond. The Law Centre provides legal advice services free and does not charge individual clients for its services.

Islington Law Centre is a full member of the Law Centres Network (LCN) and participates fully in joint initiatives and policy development in partnership with other Law Centres.

The Law Centre currently employs 35 people, and 5 years ago moved to new offices near the Angel, in the south of the London Borough of Islington. This move has been very positive, and has significantly improved the facilities for clients.

The Law Centre holds the Law Society Lexcel Quality Mark.

The Law Centre receives funding from the local authority, the Legal Aid Agency (with whom we have contracts to provide publicly funded Legal Aid), City of London law firms, Charitable Trusts, Foundations and donations.

We are a Registered Charity and a Company Limited by Guarantee. Our turnover is in the region of £1.5 million per annum.

**Community Facing Immigration Team**

The Immigration Unit at Islington Law Centre comprises the community facing Immigration Team and two hosted specialist projects, the Migrants’ Law Project (MLP) and the Migrant and Refugee Children’s Legal Unit MiCLU). The MLP protects and promotes the rights of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants through a combination of strategic legal work and training. MiCLU is a legal and policy hub, promoting the rights of migrant children.

The community facing team provides general immigration advice and assistance for individuals including applications for leave to remain to the Home Office, entry clearance to the ECO, asylum and fresh asylum claims, appeals to the IAC and Judicial Reviews. We are committed to providing high quality legal advice and assistance and ensuring access to justice for the most vulnerable.

As well as accepting referrals from the local authority and the two local MPs, the team get referrals from a wide variety of sources such as the Helen Bamber Foundation, Freedom from Torture and the Red Cross. The team delivers two separate weekly outreach sessions – at Hackney Migrant Centre and at Haringey Migrant Support Centre. The work the team does with the two organisations is based on a model of collaborative working to ensure vulnerable people's needs are met, whether this is around immigration or destitution, for example.

Whilst the main focus of the team is individual casework, we do also carry out strategic work - for example our case challenging the refusal of the Lord Chancellor to bring back legal aid for unaccompanied and separated children who need non asylum legal advice (which was done jointly with MiCLU) resulting in Legal Aid being made available for such cases. The team have also been involved in providing training sessions for local authority staff and community groups, for example in relation to Windrush and human rights applications. The Law Centre Immigration & Asylum Team received a Category 1 independent Peer Review from the Legal Aid Agency.

**Other Services Provided**

In addition to providing publicly funded work the Law Centre offers services funded by other sources in: Community Care, Consumer, Debt, Education, Employment, Housing, Immigration and Asylum, Public Law and Welfare Benefits. We have 3 specialist projects – the Migrants’ Law Project (MLP); the Migrant and Refugee Children’s Legal Unit (MiCLU); and StreetLegal – a young people’s homelessness project.

The Law Centre offers a telephone advice service in addition to having an on-going caseload of around 1,400 cases. We are open to the public Monday to Friday from 10am - 1pm and 2pm to 4pm for drop in and general enquiries, and from 6.30 pm to 9.30pm Monday to Wednesday for our pro bono evening clinics. The Law Centre is open for appointments and client interviews Monday to Friday from 9am – 6pm.

We have an extensive range of outreach services, offering 18 sessions a week, at venues that include community organisations, Islington Council’s housing offices, and Help on Your Doorstep, a local outreach charity.

The Law Centre has good links with a number of London City law firms, and operates evening advice sessions for people with consumer and small claims issues, which are staffed by volunteer solicitors from partner firms. These sessions are held on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings.

We offer telephone advice support to local community organisations, and work closely with a range of other agencies and unfunded groups.

The Law Centre is a founding member of Islington Advice Alliance, and has close working links with Islington People’s Rights, Citizens Advice Service, and Help on Your Doorstep.

## Staff Structure and Volunteers

The Law Centre has recently undergone a restructure and now employs a Director, a Deputy Director, and an Office & Facilities Manager and is in the process of recruiting a Company Accountant. These four posts will form the Senior Management Team (SMT). The Director is responsible to the Board of Trustees for the day to day running of the organisation.

The Law Centre staff is currently comprised of 18 staff members who are qualified as solicitors or barristers, the majority are practising solicitors with many years PQE, 10 specialist caseworkers, two Reception and Referral staff and project support staff. We currently engage a qualified accountant to oversee our finances.

We have at least one Supervisor for all areas of law practised with the majority of areas having two in order to provide continuity during periods of holiday or absence.

We are extremely grateful for the assistance of a large number of volunteers, who assist with a variety of tasks within the Law Centre.

## Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees currently has 9 members, some of whom have been on the Board for a number of years, and some who are fairly new to this role. The Board includes lawyers with an interest in the work of the Law Centre, and other members with relevant skills and experience.

The Director is responsible for liaising with the Board and meetings are held approximately every 8 weeks, during the evening.

The Board provides oversight and governance of the Law Centre, and members hold formal responsibility as Directors of the Company and Trustees of the Charity.

## Plans for the Future

Over the past 4 to 5 years the Law Centre’s funding has been affected by the reduction in the areas of law funded via the Legal Aid scheme that were implemented in 2013. Nevertheless the Law Centre has managed to provide a service in a range of areas of law that many similar organisations have had to stop doing. We were very pleased to have been successful in our application to Islington Council for a grant under their Strategic Advice Partners programme.

Despite any reductions in funding we have been able to develop a number of innovative and creative solutions to the emerging needs of clients, and have a number of priorities for the future which include:

* Continuing to undertake strategic litigation and policy and advocacy work on behalf of our client groups
* Updating and improving our Mission, Objectives and Values
* Improving our infrastructure, particularly ICT as part of the joint initiative by the Law Centres Network, to ensure that we can maintain the quality of our work and strengthen our relationships with funders, donors and supporters
* Increasing our unrestricted income, so that we can build our reserves and adapt in a changing funding climate
* Securing funding to maximise the capacity of our casework teams as we are experiencing very high demand for our services
* Building our joint work with other organisations to maximise the impact of our work