

# Impact Report 2023

Free access to specialist  
legal help for our community



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## Client anonymity disclaimer

Note: throughout this report some clients' names have been changed, to protect anonymity

# Introduction

STUART HEARNE, ILC DIRECTOR

Islington is a really exciting, friendly, diverse and welcoming place to live and work. It is well known for its range of restaurants and nightlife with fringe theatres and the world renowned Sadlers Wells. We have a vibrant social and cultural life. Islington is however a very unequal place. Income inequality is very high and we know from the Trust for London poverty report 2021 that a shocking 38% of children in Islington are living in poverty.

Islington is also an area with a long history of social innovation, from Mary Wollstonecraft opening a school for girls in Islington back in 1784, to the establishment of this Law Centre in Islington in 1973. We have a very strong voluntary and community sector across the Borough and the Law Centre is proud to play an active role in supporting and developing these relationships. We work closely with the local authority, the other advice partners and community organisations to help

to provide the resources for residents to tackle the effects of poverty and inequality and to assist everyone to take a full part in the life of our community.

We know that before the coronavirus pandemic poverty was unacceptably high in Islington and across London and we know that the effects of the pandemic, the reduction in Universal Credit, the ending of the furlough scheme and the state of the public finances, will fall disproportionality on the poorest and most marginalised in our society. The need for the Law Centre has never been greater.

Over the last year we have worked tirelessly to strengthen the structures and financial underpinning of the Law Centre, to improve our IT systems and to improve the reception and interview facilities so that we are in a better position to work with the residents who will need our services now and into the future.



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The need for the Law Centre has never been greater.

Now in its 50th year, the Law Centre continues to be committed to serving the Islington community, and in the last year we worked with over 1400 new clients, as well as on over 2200 current cases and enquiries. We are proud to have been able to support so many people in the last year.



Now in its 50th year, the Law Centre continues to be committed to serving the Islington community, and in the last year we worked with over 1400 new clients, as well as on over 2200 current cases and enquiries. We are proud to have been able to support so many people in the last year.

As well as directly impacting the lives of individuals, with our strategic litigation work we aim to impact the lives of many.

Recently our core immigration team and MiCLU joined forces to bring a legal challenge to the application of a 10 Year Route to Settlement to young people who entered the UK as children and have lived here for more than half their lives. The teams had acted for a number of young people who arrived in the UK as small children and could remember no other home. They were facing not being settled in the UK until their 30s, and found the constant need to re-assert their right to remain in the country that is their home upsetting and destabilising. We worked closely with the organisation We Belong and, following our litigation on the issue, and their campaign, the Home Office introduced an amendment to policy to provide that young people in this group can obtain settlement after 5 years rather than 10, cutting the time and cost involved in half.

This new policy will make a huge difference to these young people's lives - rather than being drained financially and emotionally, they can be putting their full energies and resources into developing their futures and supporting their community.

One of the young people the team represented in this challenge was Ayesha. Ayesha has lived in Islington since her arrival in the UK at the age of 9. Abandoned by her mum, and left to fend for herself, she was shocked to find out that she was not British and struggled to know what to do. Ayesha's experiences as an undocumented young person placed her in danger, and she developed PTSD as a result. ILC assisted her to regularise her stay in the UK when she was 19. However, the need to constantly re-apply for leave to remain prevented Ayesha from recovering from her health problems, trapped her in poverty and put her under considerable strain. Now the mother of two British children with disabilities she already had a lot to cope with. As part of our litigation Ayesha has been granted permission to remain permanently. Feeling safe and settled at last is vitally important to Ayesha and to her children.

We are, as always, very grateful for the incredible hard work and commitment of all our staff and volunteers. This year we said

goodbye to a number of wonderful, committed colleagues. We have been very pleased to welcome new staff including Andy in the welfare rights team, Rawnak and Sarver in housing, and two new additions to our busy core immigration team, paralegals Claudia and Naomi. The Law Centre is committed to encouraging the next generation of legal aid lawyers, and it is only through the ongoing generosity of our funders that we can support these positions. We also continue to be very grateful for the support from our local partnerships with Help on Your Doorstep, Islington People's Rights, Citizens Advice Islington, BAMER, Community Language Support Services, Hackney Migrant Centre and Haringey Migrant Support Centre. There is extremely high demand for our services and we continue to receive far more referrals than our caseworkers can take on. As we go into the next year we are looking forward to supporting as many people as we can and witnessing how, with support to resolve their legal issues, clients can positively move on with their lives and be able to take a bigger role in the wider community and society.

LINDSAY EDKINS ON BEHALF OF THE TRUSTEES



# Our impact in the past year



We opened **567** new cases

**3704** cases and enquiries were dealt with overall by ILC staff



The reception team handled over

**6000** enquiries

The Evening Advice Clinic, in which volunteer lawyers give one-off advice to residents supervised by ILC coordinators, had

**256** appointments

The Welfare Rights team secured **over £2 million** in additional income for local people

\*substantial delays in the system have meant that figures are higher than usual because cases are taking longer overall



The welfare rights form filling clinic had

**176** appointments

The immigration teams opened **almost 200** new cases

“ This is the best solicitors, they fight for you and ensure you have a better and happier life.

“ I would like to thank Roopa and Juliana for fighting my case. I hope in the future I can return the favour somehow, without their help I wouldn't be the happiest I've been in years. They are honestly the best.

# Janice's story

“

*Without the help of the Law Centre I'd have been stuck. Megan is brilliant – she is a diamond an absolute diamond, I'd be lost without her.*

*They know what they're doing – people like us who don't know how to deal with the DWP, it's so great to have their help and knowledge. They're so very very supportive.*

*I think that without places like the Law Centre people would be really really stuck.*

Janice has been an Islington resident for almost 40 years. She was in receipt of PIP (Personal Independence Payment) but upon renewal she lost her mobility award.

She met with Megan, an ILC welfare rights advisor, who assisted Janice to ask for a mandatory reconsideration, and subsequently appealed that decision when the standard rate was awarded.

Upon appeal Janice was eventually awarded the enhanced rate for both awards, and backdated PIP payments for 19 months.



# Welfare Rights Unit



The welfare rights unit has **four caseworkers** and **two casework supervisors** who advise and represent on welfare rights, including

- Personal Independent Payments
- Universal Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Employment & Support Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance

## Appeal Work

A key specialist service we run is our highly successful appeal work. Over 80% of the appeals we represent at are concerned with disability and sickness benefits, namely Personal Independence Payment (PIP), the sickness element of Universal Credit (UC), or Employment Support Allowance (ESA). The figures show a system that is not working for those in need: nationally, over 75% of PIP claims that are appealed have the decision overturned at tribunal\*; our own success rate runs at 92%. Over 40% of those who receive a nil award on application are subsequently awarded the highest rate of PIP\*\*. The impression is of a system in crisis, one unable to trust its own decision making processes, and it is vital that we are here to help people achieve justice.

\*This figure is in a written reply to a Freedom of Information request made by the Child Poverty Action Group.

\*\*Contained in a written parliamentary answer from April 2023.

## Universal Credit

The last year has seen Universal Credit overtake PIP as our number one area of enquiry; this is to be expected as more and more people are moved on to it, but there are still many claiming old-style benefits and the move to full UC has been delayed again to September 2029. This means our advisers must keep abreast of two different systems, and the difficulties are both practical and legal. Ever-changing rules mean our advisers must be vigilant about exactly when circumstances in a clients claim occur as the dates can have a profound effect on the amount of money a claimant receives. We are also keeping a close watch on future developments, such as increased use of the deeply flawed sanctions system.

The welfare rights team took on **234** new cases and worked on **756** existing cases & enquiries

“ She had so much warmth in her voice, I really trusted her. I had a call back from Megan, and then things really started to happen.

## Charlotte's story

Charlotte's daughter contracted brain cancer when she was in her early twenties, and Charlotte went from working a busy job to needing to spend a lot of time caring for her daughter. She was reliant on her carer's allowance and income support.

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*A week before Christmas I looked at my bank and my carer's allowance hadn't come in. I was devastated. I rang the DWP and they had decided to stop it as my daughter wasn't going to get DLA anymore. I asked why and they said that after her telephone consultation in October they had decided not to award it. They also advised that income support would be stopping soon. I was crying in the street and a neighbour advised to call ILC.*

*There was a receptionist and as soon as she answered the phone I couldn't stop crying. I said that my daughter has been diagnosed with brain cancer, she can't do without me, she needs me every day. She falls down all the time. She had so much warmth in her voice, I really trusted her. I had a call back from Megan, and then things really started to happen. It's so traumatic to think about how things could have ended up – I had no fight left in me.*

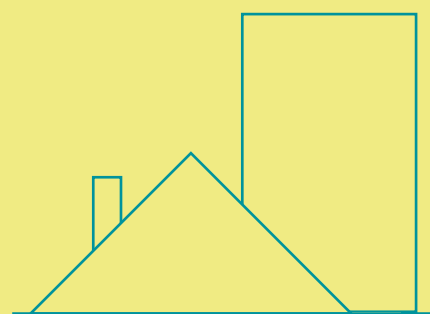
*Thanks to Megan everything was reinstated.*

*Things for the future are amazing. They gave the benefits until 2025, so she doesn't have to reapply every 18 months. Not to have that worry, is amazing.*

*The oncologist said that there's no reason why she can't live to be 100. She is now disabled, but she is incredible.*



# Housing Unit



The team specialises in Possession Proceedings; Eviction; Homelessness; Disrepair and Rehousing and other Landlord and Tenant issues.

The housing team at Islington Law Centre comprises three solicitors and one caseworkers specialising in housing law. It is dedicated to providing specialist legal advice to the residents of Islington.

## County Court Advice Desk

The Law Centre set up the first scheme in the country back in 1982. The scheme provides a vital and urgent service to tenants and borrowers facing possession proceedings and eviction. Based at the Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court duty advisors provide advice on the day of the court hearing, seek to negotiate with landlords and lenders and represent in Court. The scheme is highly successful and possession orders and evictions are prevented. We assist almost a thousand tenants and borrowers each year. Our housing team at the Law Centre deliver the service with agents from other voluntary sector organisations and private practise.

## Outreach

Our service includes two outreach projects –The Three Advice Projects (TAP) and the Independent Advice Project (IAP).

The Three Advice Projects delivers three advice sessions each week to tenants of all tenures in the Borough, and a number of people who do not have a tenancy but, for instance, live with friends or relations.

**433** clients were advised through TAP in the past year

The housing unit worked on a total of **1318** cases and enquiries

## Michael's story

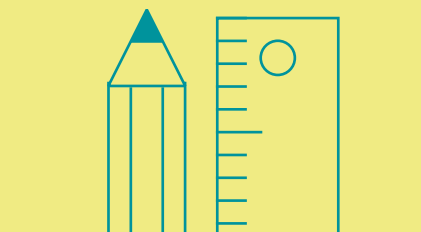
### Challenging unfair decisions

We were consulted by Michael, an Islington Council tenant, who was living in a studio flat. Since being granted the tenancy 10 years previously he had married and had two young children aged under 2 years.

Michael was disabled and suffered from mental health problems and physical disabilities and his wife was suffering from post natal depression. The property was also damp and affecting the health of the children. There was no room for the children to develop and play and Michael was sleeping in a chair. We intervened and assisted Michael to apply for medical and welfare points under the council's housing allocation scheme. The council initially refused points and we challenged the decision which successfully led to Michael being moved into a two bedroom home.



# Education Unit



The Education Unit works on cases involving exclusion, special educational needs, school admissions appeals and allegations of bullying, and has proudly been advising the families of Islington for many years.

Suzanne started in the Education Unit in 2002 and has been providing expert advice to families, and educating others via trainings, ever since. Educational advice provision is few and far between, and the ILC Education Unit is a vital source of expert advice in this field, for families who are often in great distress- when clients approach ILC they often haven't known about specialist education advice or that there could be a legal redress.

One key thing that Suzanne regularly sees is the knock on effect of exclusions on life opportunities and housing.

She recalls how she recently saw a client's mother whom she had advised 17 years ago when her 6 year-old son was facing permanent exclusion for behavioural issues. Through Suzanne's advice the mother could challenge the exclusion, so that he could continue with his education at the school. The son is now about to begin a scholarship at a US university for a Masters in business studies, and the mother was so grateful for Suzanne's help all those years ago.



“

*Families are frequently in great distress when they approach ILC, and they often haven't known about specialist education advice or that there could be a legal redress.*

**68** existing cases and enquiries worked on

**29** new cases opened

## J's story

### Challenging disability discrimination

J was 18 years old and studying A Levels at a local sixth form college and she had received a number of conditional offers for university. J had been affected by anxiety and depression for over a year and her college was informed of this. During this period she also developed an eating disorder. J's mental health conditions affected her ability to attend college and her attendance had been irregular for over 18 months. The college put in place a number of measures to support J such as reducing the amount of time she had to attend college and allowing her to study from home some of the time. Without warning the college informed J that she had to achieve 100% attendance for the

first 2 weeks of the new term. J was unable to do this and was subsequently informed that her place had been terminated. This happened a few weeks before the first lockdown and it was impossible for her to find another college place. J was very distressed at the college's decision, not least because she would not be able to sit her A levels and hopefully go on to university.

We argued that the college had constructive knowledge that J was a disabled person due to her long-term health conditions and that as a result they had an ongoing duty to make reasonable adjustments. A claim of disability discrimination was lodged at the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal. We eventually reached a settlement with the college which included a payment of £5000 to J.

# The Evening Advice Clinic



The evening clinic runs on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings and is open to those who live, work or study in Islington, and cannot afford a solicitor.

The pro bono advice is provided by volunteer lawyers, who come from six City firms and are supported by our two evening clinic supervisors. The main areas dealt with include small claims, landlord and tenant disputes and consumer law. From 2022-2023, 140 volunteers across five firms assisted the EAC on Monday and Wednesday evenings.

We are grateful to our volunteer lawyers from: CMS, Mayer Brown, Slaughter and May, Freshfields, Deloitte and Dechert.

**140 volunteers** assisted the evening advice clinic in the last year

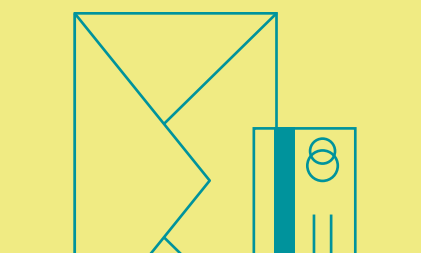
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It's important for me to share my skill set. I hope it's rewarding for clients but it's also rewarding for participants. It's useful to build skills like relationship management, interviewing clients, and for junior lawyers to gain skills in drafting and research. It's a different type of client than our normal day to day, and it's interesting to see a different type of legal problem.

- A lawyer who has volunteered for over five years with the Evening Advice Clinic



# Debt Unit



Debt advice is in increasingly high demand and there is often a lack of specialist knowledge in this area.

As well as direct referrals through our reception, our specialist debt worker Shabnam sees clients referred by local organisation Help on Your Doorstep.

We have seen a consistent increase in priority debts – such as rent, council tax, and fuel – which is a worrying trend. This suggests that people are paying the creditors who shout the loudest, and they will nearly always be those with the least claim on any available money. If there is a message to get out to Islington residents it is this – pay the priorities first, no matter who is shouting for the money.

**161** existing cases and enquiries worked on in 2022-23 and **109** new enquiries

**£203,067** total Written off (DRO, Bankruptcy, write-off, Mental Health Breathing Space)



## Joanna's story

Joanna came to the Law Centre when she was struggling with a large amount of debt, which was causing her an awful lot of stress.

*It started out with an emergency credit card and then once it was in my purse I kept using it. I then took out another credit card and was given an £8000 credit card limit.*

*It got to the point that the balance was maxed out and they then started charging interest. I then got a loan to pay off the credit card. It was so stressful, money was constantly on my mind. I also had so much going on in my personal life.*

Joanna met with Shabnam, who talked with Joanna about her options, and it was eventually decided that Joanna would apply for bankruptcy.

Joanna had felt embarrassed to speak about her debt, but said;

*Shabnam showed me that there was nothing to be embarrassed about and that I'm not the only one. The first time I spoke to her she gave me a few solutions and left it for me to decide, but advised what she thought would be best for me in the long term. She would respond to emails the same day, she was a fantastic support. I would recommend her service to anyone.*

Joanna would advise others with debt issues that;

*the first thing is to ask for help, it doesn't matter what kind of problem it is, there is always a solution. It happens to a lot of people but they just bury in it and go deeper and deeper The help is for free which is so important. There was no judgment and no asking 'well how did you manage to spend so much money?', there was only understanding.*

Joanna says

*if I hadn't applied for bankruptcy I would have ended up with bailiffs in my house. I don't want to think about it.*

Looking to the future, Joanna says

*Things are brighter- I can pay my bills. It's not an extravagant lifestyle, I learnt my lesson, but I can start planning for the future. I'm never getting a credit card again.*

*I'm working full time and now my wages actually stay at home, they're not just going on the debts.*

“ There was no judgment ... there was only understanding.





# Eleanor's story

Eleanor is 62 years old. She was born in the Virgin Islands and came to the UK with her grandmother and sister when she was 7. She went to school and had a daughter here, and her life was continuing normally until all came to a crash in 2015. Eleanor lost her job, and applied for a passport for work purposes.

She was not issued a passport, as the Home Office said that there was no record of Eleanor entering the country or living here – they could find nothing at all. Eleanor was shocked and very distressed – she felt like she didn't exist. A friend mentioned the 'Windrush' to her and she went along to a meeting in Hackney. It was there that Eleanor met Roopa from ILC. Roopa spoke about the Windrush scandal and Eleanor broke down in tears – it was all suddenly too real to her. Eleanor's daughter helped her find a solicitor to try to resolve the immigration issues, but the solicitor was private, and Eleanor felt that all that they were interested in was money – it did not give her confidence. Eleanor gathered extensive evidence of her long life in the UK – she had worked since she was seventeen. During the time it took to gather the evidence and process her application Eleanor was restricted from accessing many benefits, and only had jobseekers allowance to live on – it was a struggle to get by.

When Eleanor was eventually granted a form of leave to remain it was only for 30 months, and she felt that this was just not right. The thought of going through the immigration process again and renewing her leave was exhausting and traumatic.

She approached Roopa at ILC who looked over the case and advised her that there had been errors by the previous representative and that she should be able to live here indefinitely, and receive a British passport. Within a month of Roopa taking on her case, Eleanor had her British passport

“

*I can't thank Roopa enough. She has such a passion for correcting injustice. She's the one that spurred me on.*

# Core Immigration Unit



## Representing young people

Julie from the team has been working on many children's cases, including unaccompanied asylum seekers. The capacity for Julie to assist young people with immigration issues has been generously funded by Children In Need.

## Outreach

The outreach partnerships with Hackney Migrant Centre & Haringey Migrant Support Centre have continued, and the ILC immigration team have continued to run weekly advice sessions. The team take on some cases when there is capacity.

**130** outreach appointments

**198** new cases opened and **415** existing cases worked on

## Strategic litigation

### Challenge to the immigration rules for victims of domestic abuse stranded abroad – AM v SSHD

'Transnational marriage abandonment' occurs when a person deliberately abandons their partner abroad, generally in their country of origin, with the aim of preventing their partner from returning to the UK. It typically follows a pattern of domestic abuse and controlling behaviour, and is, in and of itself, domestic abuse. Nath and Roopa worked on, amongst other cases, that of 'AM'. AM was a Pakistani national married to a British citizen. She suffered severe financial, physical, emotional and sexual abuse at the hands of her husband for years while in the UK on a spouse visa. One day, her husband effectively forced her to travel to Pakistan along with their then 2-year-old daughter. Once in Pakistan, he took her travel documents away from her and, unbeknown to her, came back to the UK with their daughter. It took AM 8 long months to see her daughter again.

Whilst victims of domestic abuse who are present in the UK on account of their relationship with a British

national, can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain on the basis of the breakdown of their relationship/marriage due to domestic abuse, no such rules exist for victims stranded abroad. In 2022 ILC brought the case of AM to the High Court. The judge allowed the judicial review on the basis that the failure to make provision for victims of transnational marriage abandonment is unlawful because it discriminates against them on the basis of their location abroad, and was an interference with the victims' article 8 and 14 ECHR rights. As a result of this judgement the Home Office will need to bring in a specific route for these victims of domestic abuse to return to the UK. The case also brought to public attention the plight of these women, who are so cruelly abandoned, often separated from their children, and struggling for access to justice.

### Major concession in response to litigation challenging 10 year route to settlement for young people who came to the UK as children

In 2020-2021, solicitors in the Core Team together with MiCLU and the campaigning organisation We Belong brought a number of cases to challenge the application of the 10 year route to settlement for young migrants who had entered the UK as children. In response to litigation the Home Office announced a major policy concession in relation to the 10-year route to Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) for young

people and in June of 2022, the immigration rules were amended in order to provide for a shorter 5 year route to ILR. Learning from that litigation has given solicitors within the core team strategic focus on further challenging the application of the 10 year route to ILR for other categories of vulnerable migrants, in particular those with significant physical and/or mental health problems.

## Michael's story

“

*I'm 49 now. I came over from Zambia in 1979 at age 7, with my adoptive dad.*

*I went to a private school in London, and everything was normal. But then I had to leave school at 15 as my dad couldn't afford the fees anymore. I tried to get an NI number then but they said that I wasn't eligible - I couldn't work, claim benefits, anything. We applied to the Home Office and they just kept rejecting me. Basically I couldn't prove who I was. I always thought that I was British, as my dad was British. I was living in limbo. I started hanging around with the wrong crowd, I couldn't cope. I had a nervous breakdown in 2000 and stayed in a mental health institute for 28 days. I wouldn't wish what I went through on my worst enemy.*

*I made an application to the Home Office with a solicitor in 2013, but it was rejected- they said it couldn't be proven that I lived here continuously.*

*My dad died in 2019, and I went to a migrant charity to try to resolve my immigration situation. They looked at my case and referred me to Juliane at ILC. I went to a biometrics enrolment appointment with the Home Office and I was fully expecting to be deported to Zambia, I brought a bag. Friends were telling me that I could be. I've not been in touch with anyone there since I was a child. After about a year of seeing Juliane all of a sudden I was granted indefinite leave to remain.*

*Now everything is going well and it is all thanks to Juliane. And it was all for free at the Law Centre- if I'd had thousands of pounds I don't think I'd have got anyone as good as Juliane.”*

Specialist immigration projects

# Migrant & Refugee Children's Legal Unit (MiCLU)



MiCLU is a specialist unit with a nation-wide remit to effect policy change.

Through its mix of direct representation, strategic litigation, policy advocacy 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.

MiCLU works closely with Islington Law Centre's team of lawyers leading and developing specialist legal services aimed at upholding and improving the rights of young people.

## Breaking the Chains

Breaking the Chains is a partnership project run by MiCLU and Shpresa Programme, a charity and refugee community group working with the Albanian speaking community in London.

Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) and Reaching Communities, the project started in March 2019.

The overall objective of the project is to improve the legal representation of, and outcomes for, Albanian speaking children and young people in the UK asylum system.

The Breaking the Chains legal team provides critical legal work, policy advocacy and immigration training in conjunction with the Shpresa team, supported by lawyers at Garden Court and a wider network of volunteers and associated organisations, always working collaboratively with the young people.

## Kids in Need of Defence (KiND)

MiCLU's Kids in Need of Defence UK hub provides training, mentoring and supervision to pro bono partners assisting children who have lived in the UK for 7 years or more to regularise their status in the UK.

The project continues to expand and now undertakes citizenship applications in addition to 7 year cases.

**They hold a 100% success rate to date for their applications.**

## Hasan's story

Hasan had been in the UK for several years when he first became involved in the **Breaking the Chains** project. He had claimed asylum, but although he had been accepted as a victim of trafficking and modern slavery, his asylum claim was refused, and he was denied a right of appeal. As a former victim of trafficking, he was **vulnerable to being re-exploited**, and this is exactly what happened when his asylum claim was refused.

After his claim was refused, Hasan **lived rough and was subjected to labour exploitation** on a building site where he would often sleep at night. Working in unregulated conditions he suffered numerous injuries resulting in damage to his sight, and possibly a head injury. His mental health deteriorated very significantly.

Hasan accessed the project through another young person, one of the project's **Immigration Champions** – young people with lived experience of the asylum system who are trained to support their peers and ensure that their voices inform the project and the wider sector. His initial contact was with Shpresa's programme's **youth advocate**, and it took a huge amount of work from her, including providing him with a mobile phone, to support Hasan to reach a point where he was able to engage with legal advice at all.

Over a long period of time, and with Shpresa's advocate present on each occasion to reassure him, Hasan managed to build up the courage to talk to Esme and instruct her. Esme was then able to undertake legal work to stabilise Hasan's social and legal situation:

- Supporting him to access **safe housing**
- Supporting him to access assistance as a **victim of modern slavery**
- Supporting him to obtain a **grant of permission to remain in the UK as a victim of slavery**, because of his particular needs relating to his medical and physical health allowing him to access benefits and mainstream services for the first time
- Submitting a fresh claim for asylum with further evidence about Hasan's severe health problems demonstrating the risk he would face if removed to Albania. This application has now been granted – **Hasan has been recognised as a refugee.**

None of this legal work could have been undertaken without the **partnership work** that underpins the project and is essential to allowing very vulnerable young people to engage with legal advice and cope with living in a hostile environment.



Specialist immigration projects

# The Migrants' Law Project (MLP)



The Migrants' Law Project is a legal and public legal education project, hosted by Islington Law Centre.

The project has three main aspects: advice and representation, co-ordinating legal strategy and public legal education.

## Family Reunion

In 2021 the Migrants' Law Project represented Safe Passage International in a successful legal challenge to Home Office policy on deciding family reunion applications under the EU's rules. The High Court found that the policies were unlawful and misstated the law in significant ways. This gave circa 600 children the chance to have their cases reconsidered.

Between the first case in 2016 and 2020, the MLP saw successful family reunions go from 14 a year to around 900. This is due to both opening routes through litigation, and supporting practitioners to take these cases. It is also part of MLP's joint work with partners to campaign and improve practice in the sector. Family reunion is really critical to the wellbeing of children and families and the MLP are very pleased to have been part of this.

The MLP continue to look at family reunion for those outside of Europe. This work mainly focuses on refugees in the UK who arrived as children and are in many cases still young. They have no right to family reunion so we need to find ways to make these applications "outside the rules". It is a complex process, but is very significant for often traumatised children who are mainly alone. Through taking complex cases MLP is developing best practice – and also providing training and resources for others to take these cases.

## Challenge to inflexible biometrics policy for refugee family reunion

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## Criminality & immigration project

This project has been set up jointly with Commons Legal, funded by the AB Charitable Trust. This arises from the MLP's work with youth organisations, from which it is apparent that some young people are coming into contact with the criminal justice system – and the devastating impact this can have not just on wellbeing but also on their leave to remain in the UK.

A detailed report is being developed that draws on the experiences of young people along with criminal and immigration practitioners to develop a compelling picture of the problems faced by this very vulnerable group.

## Amanuel's story

Amanuel\* is a refugee from Eritrea, who came to the UK as an unaccompanied child. He approached MLP as his teenage sister was in a very dangerous situation in another country, and he was anxious for her to be reunited with him and find safety in the UK.

He said, 'I had my own trauma on my journey to the UK and I couldn't focus on my studies and my life. It was a desperate situation as my sister was held in prison. She was very young and she shouldn't have been in prison'. Amanuel had been trying with another solicitor to get his sister to safety in the UK, but progress was extremely slow and he was losing hope.

He met with solicitor Ruth, who worked with various partners to secure his sister's safe journey to the UK. Amanuel was eventually reunited with his sister, and she was placed in foster care.

Amanuel said;

*I was a half person without my sister. When I saw her I felt so good.*

*I couldn't have done it without the Law Centre. I had other lawyers but it didn't work very well, they were wasting time. But then I met Ruth, and it was very quick.*

*My sister was so stressed in prison. She's having a tutor now and will start school soon. Everything is amazing. She loves her foster family. Ruth is my hero, her work was amazing. She was always in touch. She is not just my lawyer, she is the saviour of my life and my family.*

*To others – there is always hope. Have a faith and belief and someday it is going to change. Some people are good and they're going to help. In the future my sister has said that she wants to be a police officer, or maybe a lawyer, as she wants to help people who have been innocently detained.*

# Meet some of the ILC team



## Serdar housing solicitor

Serdar joined ILC in 2019, and prior to that worked at another Law Centre. He was drawn to ILC because of the excellent reputation of the housing team, and likes working in an environment with different departments.

Some days Serdar works at the County Court possession advice scheme at Clerkenwell & Shoreditch – advising people with hearings who don't have solicitors, trying to negotiate payment terms to help them keep their home and putting forward defences on their behalf.

Serdar also works at the outreach projects – advising on issues that people can't normally get Legal Aid for – including anti-social behaviour, transfers and repair problems. Serdar also represents tenants and homeless persons under legal aid.

## Yomi welfare rights supervisor

Yomi has worked at the Law Centre since 2022, and previous to this was in the welfare rights team at a London council for 22 years.

Yomi advises clients and represents at tribunal to challenge refusal of benefits including Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and Personal Independence Payment.

He has regular time slots at the office to see clients, and always keeps time aside for emergency cases.

At a recent appeal for a client with a learning disability Yomi recalls how pleased the client was with his positive result, and how he in turn was very glad that he had been able to assist the client to effectively present his case.



## Sheeba receptionist

Sheeba has worked at Islington Law Centre for 17 years. She started as a volunteer whilst completing her law degree, and later became a full-time member of the reception team. The ILC reception is extremely busy, and the phone does not stop ringing all day. Sheeba says 'my work is fulfilling because I am helping underprivileged, disadvantaged individuals who would not get the quality of help elsewhere. Clients express their thanks for being listened to and treated with humanity and professionalism. I endeavour to ensure that this quality of service is provided by ILC'.



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## Francesca evening advice clinic supervisor

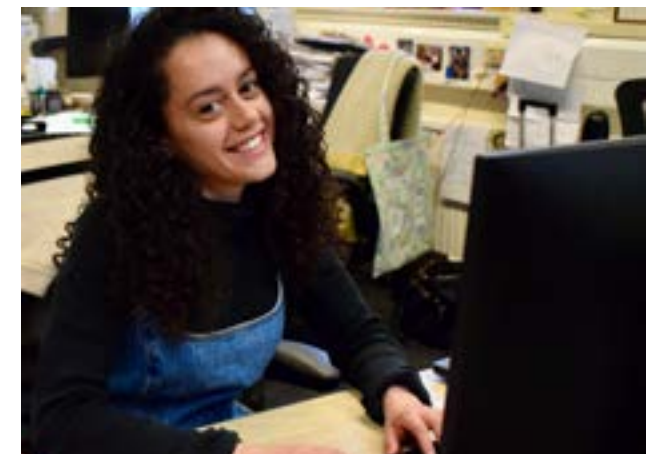
Francesca has been with ILC since 2020. Prior to this, she worked in family law for seven years.

Francesca says one of the aims of the advice clinic is to give the clients “the tools and knowledge to be able to help/ represent themselves”. It also encourages clients, where possible, to try to resolve issues without having to resort to lengthy court proceedings. Francesca remarks how cuts to legal aid and other sources of funding have meant that a huge section of people no longer have access to legal advice. The advice clinic is an important resource “helping people who cannot afford to pay privately and so would otherwise have no access to legal advice”.

## Emily immigration paralegal

Emily joined ILC in October 2022. She previously worked for non-governmental organisations, including to support projects for displaced people in Turkey and Myanmar. She is particularly inspired by the law centre's work to help overcome the barriers many people face to obtaining legal advice and accessing justice.

Her day-to-day work is very varied, including drafting funding applications and letters, creating and organising bundles, and being involved in client meetings and casework follow up.





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## Ana's story

“

*I'd had two lawyers who messed up all of my documentation and when I first came to the Law Centre I was without hope. Nath gave me hope and she motivated me – it was amazing for me. I call her my angel. Less than six months after she started helping me I had my documentation for myself and my children. You can't imagine how my heart is. I hope more people find you guys.*

Ana arrived in the UK in the mid-2000s. She is the single mother of three children, born in the UK. Ana came to Islington Law Centre at a time when she had a pending fresh asylum claim. Shortly after we took her case on, the Home Office contact her to ask evidence which indicated that they were minded to grant her 2.5 years on a 10-year route to indefinite leave to remain. Indeed, this is what she was granted shortly after.

However, having taken further instructions from Ana, and having reviewed recent caselaw, it became apparent that Ana was actually eligible for settled status, that is indefinite leave to remain, under the EU Settlement Scheme.

The application for settled status was successfully submitted, and Ana was granted indefinite leave. In practice, Ana 'saved' 10 years to get indefinite leave to remain, 4 cumbersome and paper-heavy extension applications, and potentially thousands of pounds.

In addition, it appears that Ana's children might have been born British, or, in any event, are eligible for British citizenship. This means they will grow up to be able to travel with their fellow classmates, have access to student loans and university.



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EVENING ADVICE CLINIC

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