

# ANNUAL REVIEW

2022–2023

Your Law Centre – supporting the community through difficult times





*The Mayor of Southwark, Councillor Michael Situ, came on our sponsored legal walk*

“I actually don't have much to say other than to appreciate the whole team from day one to the last day I received the Biometric Residence Permit in the office. Thank you.”

A quote from one of our clients

# Mission Statement

Southwark Law Centre aims to promote access to justice for people in need, primarily in Southwark and Lewisham.

We work towards achieving our mission by providing specialist, high-quality and free legal advice and representation to those who could not otherwise afford to receive legal services. We provide casework and representation in the areas of discrimination, education, employment, housing, planning, public law welfare rights, asylum/immigration law, and support with the Windrush compensation scheme.

We prioritise cases which involve the prevention of homelessness, destitution, discrimination, breaches of human rights and poverty.

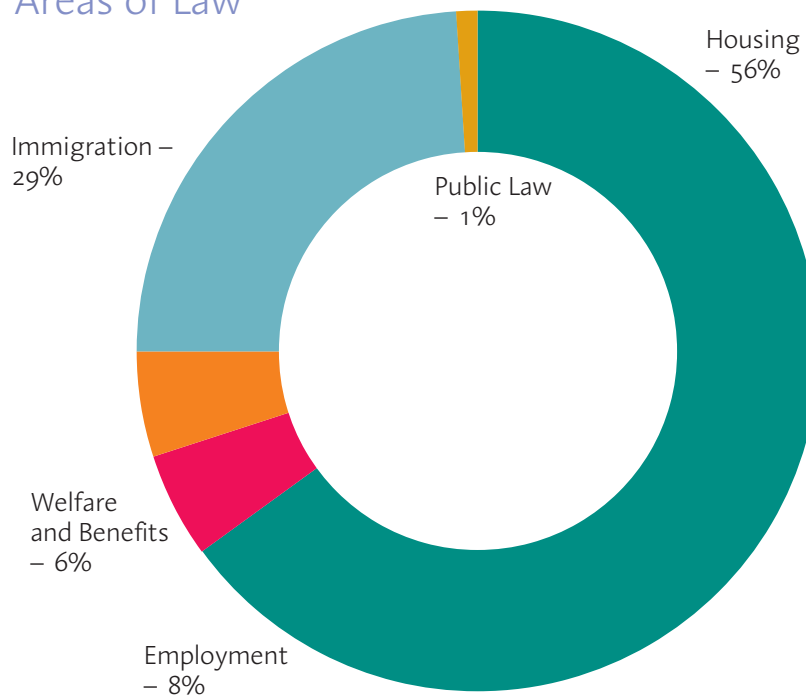
We provide training on social welfare law issues for local advice and community agencies. We also campaign to influence law, policy and practice and promote human and civil rights.

## Key activities 2022/2023

- We provided high quality legal advice for over 2,000 local residents.
- We provided second tier advice to help frontline organisations to progress over 300 cases.
- We provided training and awareness sessions for frontline workers and the public on issues such as private tenants housing rights and the Windrush compensation scheme.
- We set up a new project to provide welfare benefits advice for people with Sickle Cell disease.
- We set up a new project to provide immigration casework for homeless patients in Lewisham hospital.
- We became the lead in a major new project across South East London providing immigration casework for people who are homeless.
- 100% of our clients' surveyed were happy with the service they received.

# Numbers & types of cases we dealt with 2022/23

## Areas of Law



## Where our clients live 2022/2023, 1290 total cases

The breakdown of post codes below show that the majority of clients come from Southwark. Clients are mainly spread across Southwark and Lewisham with concentration in areas of most disadvantage. 143 Clients recorded as living in Lewisham borough.

Postcode	Percent	Postcode	Percent
SE1	1%	SE21	1%
SE4	10%	SE22	4%
SE5	1%	SE23	2%
SE8	3%	SE24	1%
SE11	14%	SE26	2%
SE15	7%	Other *	32%
SE16	5%		
SE17	1%	Lewisham	15%
SE19	1%		

\* Other includes people who have been dispersed outside the Borough or have No fixed abode.

# Our Chair's Report



*John Rhodes, Chair of Trustees*

Southwark and Lewisham have one of the largest and most effective law centres in the UK.

This report summarises the really important work and determination of a great team. So it is invidious to choose areas to highlight. But two in particular reflect wider issues.

The first area is our partnership with other community groups, agencies, law firms and students to help Windrush victims secure proper treatment from the Home Office compensation scheme. In the words of Martin Forde KC who designed the scheme, its implementation has been 'woeful'. The Government itself recognises there have been injustices and administrative failures. So it seems wrong that claimants still trying to secure proper compensation are not eligible for legal aid. We are therefore proud that our Windrush team has just secured an urgent judicial review of this Legal Aid Agency policy.

The second area might appear to be a failure. We have recently lost the legal aid contract to run the County Court help desk for those tenants in Lambeth and Southwark facing imminent eviction. Our very experienced housing Solicitor has run this contract for 17 years. Working with our wider team of housing Solicitors and benefits experts, he has successfully helped many hundreds of desperate families keep their homes.

The Legal Aid Agency ( LAA ) recently re-bid the contract for the first time since we rescued the service in 2019 following the collapse of Lambeth Law Centre. We were marked a close second to a law firm. We accept the outcome, and genuinely wish them well. But what is depressing is that we are not altogether sorry to have lost. It was becoming increasingly unaffordable. There was no increase on the set fee of £60,000 pa paid by the LAA , but it was costing us closer to £100,000 pa to run it properly.

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SOUTHWARK LAW CENTRE



Readers may feel that I 'have a thing' about legal aid. I do. But I'm not alone in criticising legal aid rates for immigration legal advice that have halved in real terms since 1996, and that those for housing have not risen since being cut by 10% in 2011. A long overdue review covering rates and contract administration began in January, but any practical improvements flowing from it may well not happen before 2025. That is too long. The Law Society describes legal aid as now being 'in crisis', and the Chair of the Bar Council says that urgent action is needed to prevent 'a profound impact on access to justice'. They are right.

We are pleased and grateful that the other funders listed in this report - no fewer than 19 - are much more generous, with some offering increases to help ease the impact of recent inflation. Our total pay costs represent some 80% of our budget and increased by about £8,000 a month last year in line with the national local authority pay settlement. A similar rise is

expected this year. So we are obviously keeping a particularly close eye on our finances, and continue to seek and secure new funding opportunities. In the current climate, our focus has been on maintaining our range of services, paying our people fairly, and remaining financially robust.

I am sorry if I seem to dwell on some of the challenges and frustrations we face. This report clearly shows amazing work and initiatives by the law centre. And everyone was delighted that Sally Causer's leadership, and her wider community commitment, was recognised this year when she was one of just two people awarded the Freedom of Southwark.

It is a reflection of the enormous commitment of everyone that they persevere despite the relentless workload and emotional pressures. And also despite the irresponsible public attacks on 'Lefty lawyers'.



*Sally Causer The Director receiving the Freedom of Southwark Award.*

As trustees, we salute them all - along with our funders and partners - for what they do to help struggling individuals and communities in our boroughs feel that the law exists to serve and protect everyone in our society.

# Director's Report



*Sally Causer, Director*

## Overview of 2022/3

The impact of the pandemic continued for the people we support, on top of which people were hit by the so called 'cost of living crisis'. It was really an inequality crisis with people who were already disadvantaged being impacted the most. Our experienced housing team had never seen such high levels of rent arrears for private and social housing tenants. With Southwark Council reporting £19m arrears for their tenants.

The hostile environment for refugees and migrant has got immeasurable worse with squalid conditions in overcrowded hotels and the threat of being moved to ex-army barracks or floating prison ships. Immigration lawyers have been scapegoated by the Government and blamed for the backlog in asylum decisions. It is very frightening that Charity workers have now been targeted by right wing groups. In July the Illegal

Migration Bill became law. We do not know yet what the full impact will be as it does not seem to be a deterrent and it is likely to lead to more destitution and demands on Local Authority and Health Services.

I am constantly amazed by the skill and dedication of our teams and the fact they continue to achieve excellent results for our clients despite backlogs in the Home Office, the DWP and the Court and Tribunal service.

The hangover from the pandemic has affected the Law Centre finances. Although we carried on supporting the community during lockdown we were able to take on fewer cases and because of the time delay in payment of Legal Aid income it was the 2022/3 year that we saw the impact of a reduction in this income.

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We are grateful to Southwark Council and all our other funders many of whom provided an uplift on our contracts and grants.

Because of their support we have maintained all our areas of work including the newer areas such as planning, education and Windrush compensation casework. We have almost doubled the number of cases taken on last year.



*Miatta Fahnbulleh, prospective parliamentary candidate for Peckham, visits Southwark Law Centre*

Finally I would like to thank our dedicated Trustees who have continued to lead and support the Law Centre keeping oversight of our financial situation and providing strong governance.

### Some key areas of work 2022/3

- We are pleased to be working with Councillor Jasmine Ali, community sector colleagues and council officers to make Southwark a Borough of Sanctuary.
- We have successfully embedded the South East London sub regional immigration casework service for people sleeping rough working in partnership with Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network. This project has also enabled us to develop links within the Borough of Lambeth.

### 2023/4 and beyond what success looks like

- Southwark Law Centre will be a champion for Equality Diversity and Inclusion
- We will maintain capacity within all the teams to be able to respond to demand.
- We will work with communities to identify needs and co-develop new projects.
- Staff will feel properly supported and that there is good communication within the organisation.
- We will develop our capacity to influence national policies.
- We will improve our contribution to tackling the climate crisis by minimising our environmental impact.

# Employment & Discrimination report

In 2022/3 the Law Centre provided advice in 63 employment cases, continuing to provide a regular telephone outreach session for clients referred by Citizens Advice Southwark.

Although the Law Centre holds a Legal Aid contract for discrimination, the lack of legal aid makes this area of work extremely challenging as funding is not available for representation at Tribunals and many of the Law Centre's clients are not able to represent themselves.

The Law Centre has, however, been able to use Legal Help funding to assist four clients with preparation of their claim at the Employment Tribunal.

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## Employment Case Study

The Law Centre assisted a client with successfully negotiating an exit to their employment. The client had worked for their employer for around twenty years before developing health problems which resulted in them meeting the definition of disabled under the Equality Act 2010.

Despite requests from the client to look at whether reasonable adjustments could be made, the employer had not dealt with the situation at all and the employee was left in limbo; technically an employee but not able to work or be paid. This was having a massive impact on the finances and mental health of the employee.

With our assistance, the employee was able to negotiate an exit from their job meaning that they can now concentrate

on improving their mental health and take steps to return to the workplace when they are ready to do so. Without the assistance of the Law Centre, it is likely that the limbo would have continued for a lengthy period of time causing the employee continued financial issues and stress.





# Education report

In response to identified need, the Law Centre is developing capacity to provide education advice on areas such as school exclusion and access to Specialist Education and Disability Needs. The approach of the Law Centre has been to build on the knowledge and expertise already present within the community. An advisory group has been set up involving frontline agencies and local parents.

Funding has been secured from the Baring Foundation for the Law Centre to act as a legal hub for education issues. Over the last year the Law Centre has provided a number of education rights training sessions on areas such as access to SEND support for children in families with No Recourse to Public Funds ('NRPF') status, and the role of police in schools. In addition, the Trustees would like to thank the Strategic Legal Fund for support to explore challenges around internal exclusions and SEND support for migrant children.

We are working in partnership with the Social Integration Regeneration Group to

help train and support community advocates in Lewisham and Southwark.

## Education Case Study

The Law Centre successfully defended a child at an Independent Review Panel ('IRP') hearing challenging the School's Governing Board's ('GB') decision to uphold the child's permanent exclusion. We raised three grounds of challenge: (1) disability discrimination against the child with suspected unmet special educational needs ('SEN'), (2) breach of the public sector equality duty, and (3) a failure to use exclusion as a decision of last resort.

The IRP quashed the GB's decision and directed that it reconsider reinstatement. The IRP found that the decision reached by the GB had been irrational as it failed to take into account relevant information regarding the special educational needs and

disabilities of the pupil. The IRP also found that there was procedural impropriety due to bias as there was no evidence that the GB had fully investigated and challenged the evidence against the child.

School exclusions are very complex, yet they do not fall within scope for legal aid. As such, many families remain unrepresented. This perpetuates a system that disproportionately excludes children with unmet SEN and from ethnic minorities. Our representation was important because it gave the pupil a second chance to make her case in front of the GB.

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# Housing Team Report

Housing remains one of the main advice needs in Southwark and Lewisham. The Law Centre specialises in cases involving homelessness, possession, eviction, and asylum support law.

In the year 2022/3 the Law Centre dealt with 841 cases. This is almost double the number dealt with in 2021/2 (2022/2 463 cases) and is largely due to the eviction ban being lifted following the end of covid restrictions.

As the Courts reopened and began to deal with the backlog our housing team spent most of their time either in Court or trying to deal with the cases of all the people they had seen at Court. The inadequacy of Legal Aid and difficulties in recruitment has meant that more Solicitor firms have given up on Legal Aid making it more and more difficult to find someone to take cases on.

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## Homelessness Case Study

Mr C 's Housing Association landlord was claiming that his supported housing was let under a licence and could be ended by a Notice to Quit but using contradictory legal grounds referring to tenancy rent arrears. The client was first advised by us under the Court Duty Advice Scheme and then in defending the possession claim having regard to his vulnerability (mental health, learning and literacy difficulties) and highlighting inadequate support which had resulted in a failure to claim

the correct rent-benefits. A defence under the Equality Act was included together with a disability discrimination counterclaim, after obtaining expert evidence from a Clinical Psychologist. The client was assisted by us to resolve further problems with benefits and the case was later settled with the possession claim dismissed and rent arrears of almost £14,000 reduced to nil by a compensation payment to settle the counterclaim.

In 2023/4 the Law Centre will be exploring how we can reach tenants with earlier advice. Linked to this we have funding from the Access to Justice Fund which will support a direct public line for tenants facing eviction. The Law Centre continued to receive funding from Urban Health, part of the Guy's and St Thomas' Charity, to work on a project in

partnership with Kineara, a social enterprise which provides holistic support for vulnerable tenants in the private rented sector.

The Law Centre has continued to work with Citizens Advice Southwark to provide 'Know your Rights' workshops which are well attended by private tenants.

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## Housing Team Case Study

Ms D was referred to us by Kineara. She was a single parent with a one-year old child. She was living in privately rented accommodation on the 5th floor of a block of flats. She suffered from poor mental and physical health. The client and her child were trapped in the lift for over an hour and had to be rescued by the Fire Brigade.

The client applied to the council for homelessness assistance on the grounds that her accommodation was not suitable. She suffered panic attacks and flashbacks, and was unable to use the

lift. She had difficulties managing the stairs. The council decided that she was not homeless. We assisted the client in requesting a review. We made detailed representation and submitted psychiatric evidence which confirmed that living at the accommodation was aggravating her mental health.

The council withdrew its decision and accepted the client was homeless. It accepted a main housing duty, and following further representations from the Law Centre provided suitable temporary accommodation.

The Law Centre is funded by Trust for London to provide housing advice for destitute migrants. This is an area of growing need as the number of asylum seekers in Southwark and Lewisham continues to increase and they are largely accommodated for long periods in unsuitable hotel accommodation. Changes to the Home Office policy on the amount of time from receipt of a positive decision to eviction from asylum accommodation

has reduced which will increase the risk of homelessness, and rough sleeping. The funding from Trust for London enabled us to continue to coordinate the national Housing and Immigration Group, sharing information on emerging issues and strategic litigation.

The Law Centre has provided specialist second-tier advice for local frontline agencies and has continued to work with

“Just wanted to reiterate how excellent the Housing and Immigration group meeting was both in terms of the very helpful information provided and the collaboration it offers on many pressing issues.”

Stephanie Harrison KC, Barrister  
Joint Head of Chambers Garden Court



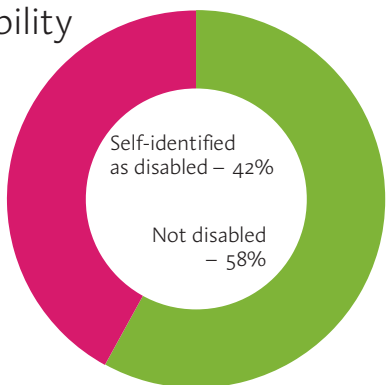
Southwark Council to facilitate the Homeless Forum which brings together statutory and community partners to aim to tackle homelessness.

In the past year the team has been joined by Rebecca – Senior Solicitor, Rita – Housing Caseworker, and Daniel – Housing and welfare rights Paralegal.

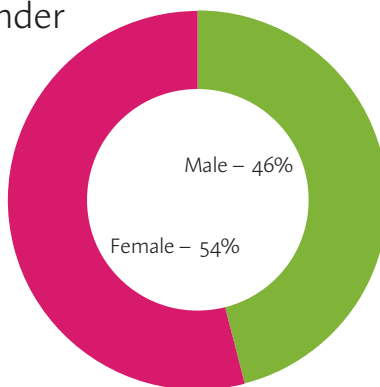
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# Our Client profile 2022/23

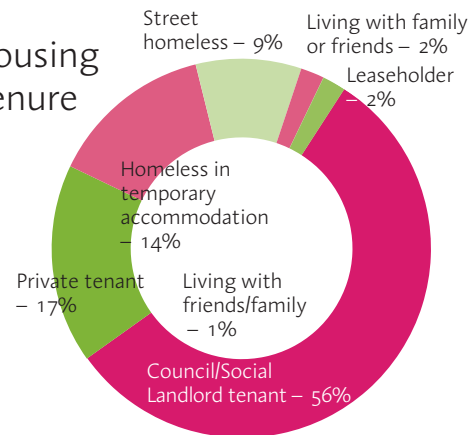
Disability



Gender



Housing Tenure

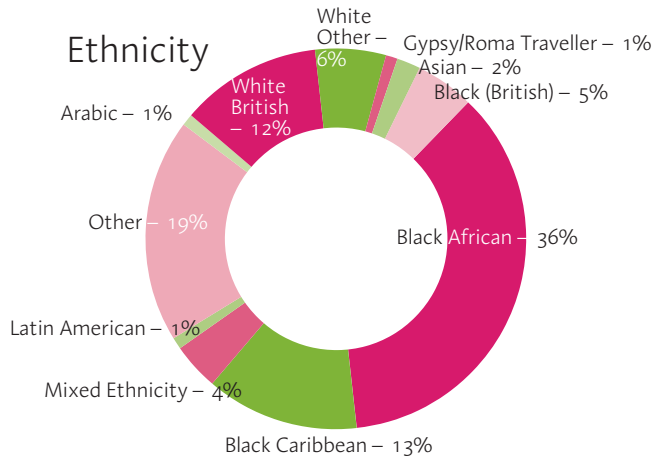


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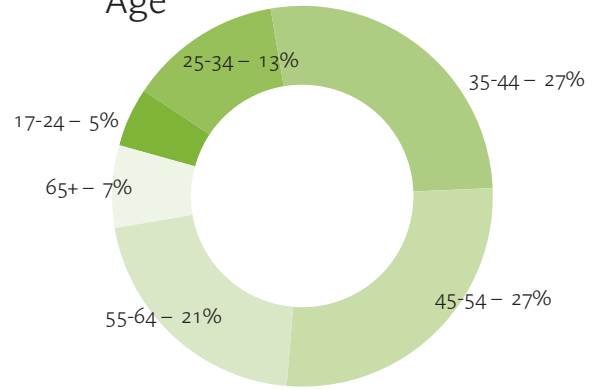




### Ethnicity



### Age



# Asylum & Immigration report

In the year 2022/3 the Law Centre dealt with 314 immigration and asylum cases (235 cases in 2021/2).

We prioritise cases for vulnerable people. Many of the clients are homeless and destitute.

“The Southwark Law Centre and Southwark Refugee Communities Forum have joined forces to improve the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the community. Our goal is to help them establish a new life in Southwark. We are proud of the positive impact our partnership has achieved”

**Eltayeb Hassan: Director Southwark Refugee Communities Forum**

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SOUTHWARK LAW CENTRE

In July 2022 the Law Centre began a major new project funded by London Councils for 3 years. The Law Centre is the South East London sub-regional lead, and will work in partnership with Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network.

The Law Centre has received continued funding from Lewisham Council to take referrals for specialist immigration advice for families and individuals supported by Lewisham’s NRPF team. In 2022/3 the Law Centre has continued working with Action for Refugees in Lewisham. Funding from Trust for London for this project has been extended for another 2 years.

The Homeless Patients Legal Advocacy Service provides casework and representation for homeless patients in partnership with the homeless teams at Guy’s and St Thomas’ hospitals. As a result of the successful outcomes this project has demonstrated in terms not only of benefits for very vulnerable patients but savings to the NHS, the project is being funded on a



*Refugee Week in Southwark 2023*

rolling basis by the GSTT Hospital Trust. A similar project based in Lewisham Hospital, funded by the SE London Integrated Care Service, began on a pilot basis in 2022 and will be evaluated later in 2023.

During 2022/3 the Law Centre continued to receive funding from the Home Office to provide assistance with more complex applications for settlement from vulnerable EEA nationals. The Law Centre worked in partnership with New Europeans and Citizens Advice Southwark.





The Law Centre continues to work with the South London Refugee Association (SLRA), to provide targeted consultancy support for their staff. SLRA has led a partnership involving the Law Centre and Project 17 which has been awarded funding from the Justice Together programme. This project started in July 2022. In 2022/3 the Law Centre continued its partnership with Project 17 funded by Trust for London to provide specialist immigration advice for families with NRPF status.

Representatives of the Law Centre attend regular King's Health Partnership Pathways team meetings in King's, Guy's, SLAM (South London and Maudsley) and St Thomas' hospitals to provide second-tier immigration advice and support for the homeless support teams funded by the Pathway project.

In early 2023 we received some additional funding from United St Saviour's Charity which enabled us to employ a new part time immigration Solicitor Ayesha.

## Immigration Case Studies

Mr K is a Pakistani national with complex post-traumatic stress disorder and psychoses. SLC supported him to make a new application for asylum based on his mental health issues, and the torture and inhumane treatment he would face on return to Pakistan as a result. This involved very careful work, taking Mr K's instructions and drafting a detailed statement whilst taking care not to cause him significant upset which would trigger self-harm. The doctor involved in Mr K's care provided

a detailed report of his condition, his symptoms and his inability to control these without specialist medical care. SLC also supported the hospital in pushing for Mr K to be provided with specialist supported accommodation under the local council's Care Act duties, which allowed him to be safely discharged. Mr K was granted refugee status in May 2023, and he reports the security of his new status has hugely helped him with managing his mental health as he finally feels safe.

Mr L instructed Southwark Law Centre in December 2019 during lockdown. He was a homeless, refused asylum-seeker from Sudan and had lived in the UK for 7 years. Mr L was a non-Arab Darfuri from the Berti tribe. The persecution of non-Arab Darfuris and particularly of the Berti tribe, is well documented. We obtained a report from an independent plastic surgeon and scarring expert, who confirmed Mr L's account of torture by burning with metal rods, while detained in Sudan, and an independent expert

psychiatric report confirming PTSD and a risk of self-harm and suicide. Despite this evidence, the Home Office went on to refuse his asylum claim, so we submitted an appeal which was allowed. In May 2023 Mr L was granted refugee status. Effectively, he had been a refugee since he left Sudan but it took 10 years for the UK authorities to recognise this. The work would not have been possible without legal aid and the Law Centre's support for Caseworkers to work from home during lockdown.

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# Windrush Justice Clinic

Our project is part of the Windrush Justice Clinics (WJC) The WJC is a collaboration between individual campaigners, community organisations, University Legal Clinics and North Kensington Law Centre.

Southwark Law Centre's involvement with the WJC partnership began in 2020, when we helped to set up the initial steering group. In 2021 we secured funding from AB Charity to provide specialist casework to employ Van, as immigration Solicitor. Funding for coordination of the partnership comes from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and enables SLC to employ a part time coordinator, Sharon. Van and Sharon are also supported by Eden administrator.

Van and Sharon together support a team of around 20 King's College University Law Students, who help in areas such as research, taking statements and evidence



*Public awareness raising on Windrush*

gathering. This helps with student's learning and development and hopefully encourages an interest in careers in immigration and social welfare law. Kings contribute matched funding to the SLC casework post.

The compensation scheme is deficient and the current Government are refusing to implement recommendations from the Williams review including independent scrutiny of the scheme and reconciliation events.

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SOUTHWARK LAW CENTRE



# Client Feedback 2022/2023

Van has worked on 30 complex cases. Compensation awards at the end of March 2023: almost £135,000, with Claims ongoing cases almost £580,000

Van is currently conducting strategic litigation to challenge the Legal Aid Agency's blanket refusal of Exceptional Case Funding for compensation claims.

If our legal challenge is successful it will mean that other not for profit organisations such as Law Centres may have the capacity to provide free high quality advice and representation for victims of the scandal.

Our casework has uncovered many other issues such as the Home Office suppressing information and anomalies in the nationality rules. These kind off issues need to be highlighted, by research and by strategic litigation.

Thank you to our volunteers Cristina and Corinna.

**Charlene**  
is an amazing Solicitor. I am blown away by her integrity and the hard work she did on my behalf. I will always be grateful for all of her efforts. I am extremely happy with the service had given by her.

Thanks to all the staff at Southwark Law Centre for their hard work and support given to me by the adviser she works very hard to help me and my mother.

Everything is good for me and my family. Thank you Ed and Southwark Law centre for helping me

You have no idea how much it means to me that my application LTR was successful. Now I can sleep very well at night. Thank you so much  
xxx

**Julia**  
was always extremely helpful & successful in helping us keep out housing winning case against council. Thank you very much.

- In the period 2022/2023, our recorded client feedback stated **100%** of our clients were very happy with the overall service provided by the Southwark Law Centre and would recommend us.

When asked in what way the advice provided improved their situation, clients responded as follows:

- Dealing with benefit issues: **8%**
- Dealing with housing issues: **24%**
- Understanding immigration rights: **68%**.



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# Lewisham Law Centre Update

Lewisham Law Centre (LLC) accredited by the Law Centres Network in 2020 is a branch office of Southwark Law Centre. We work in partnership with Citizens Advice Lewisham, (CAL) who host the service at the Leemore Centre. Trust for London provide a grant to CAL to support the housing casework, this funds a CAL para- legal and some of the running costs of the housing team.

The original needs assessment produced by Hogan Lovells evidenced that the 2 main greatest areas of need for specialist legal advice in Lewisham were housing and immigration, so these are the areas that we have developed over the last 5 years.

We take cases by referral from partner agencies rather than directly from the public. We currently hold a Legal Aid Housing contract and employ 2 Solicitors,

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Rachel and Rebecca. We have a number of immigration projects assisting Lewisham residents

- Contract with Lewisham Council to provide specialist immigration casework for people supported by the No Recourse to Public Fund team.
- Partnership with Action for Refugees in Lewisham to provide immigration advice funded by Trust for London.
- We lead a South East London immigration casework service targeted at people who are sleeping rough and work with Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network on this project. This project is funded by London Councils.
- Immigration Advice for homeless patients referred by health professionals at Lewisham Hospital. This project is funded by the South East London Integrated Care Service.

The case was referred to Georgina, our immigration Solicitor, who works on the Lewisham Hospital project.

Positive outcomes for Mr G are that he is now being provided with support under the Care Act, including accommodation, subsistence and a support worker, and his fortnightly in person reporting at the Home Office has been amended to telephone reporting.



*Thank you to Citizens Advice Lewisham for making us welcome at the Leemore Centre and supporting the development of specialist advice in Lewisham.*

## Lewisham Law Centre Case Studies

Mr M was referred to the Law Centre in June 2022. He suffered from serious and complex mental ill health including agoraphobia, fear of germs, depression and anxiety, and suicidal ideation. His relationship with his Landlord a supported housing provider broke down and he was evicted in June 2021. Mr M made a homeless application to LB Lewisham but was only accepted for the Prevention Duty, despite being actually homeless. He was left rough sleeping and 'sofa surfing'. Following SJ's referral

we assisted him in a challenge for provision of emergency housing. This was provided however we then had to challenge the suitability of the temporary accommodation on three occasions. Eventually Mr M was able to bid successfully on a one-bedroom council flat and has now moved to his own permanent property. We also assisted Mr M to obtain a £500 grant from the Vicar's Relief Fund to purchase a cooker, fridge freezer, and bed.

In recent years Mr N has been homeless and frequently admitted to ULH. He had been diagnosed with advanced liver disease due to alcoholism with a high chance of relapse owing partly to his unstable living environment and immigration status.

We submitted an application for leave to remain based on the fact Mr N has lived continuously in the UK for over 20 years – private life application. His application is ongoing, and the prospects of success are good.

“Southwark Law Centre is one of our most valued partners. Their Solicitors are experts in their field and go over and above to support Southwark and Lewisham's most vulnerable residents.. Sally and her team have provided vital strategic legal advice and support to the sector in response to government policies and practices that impact our clients. They really raise the bar on specialist legal advice.”

Sophie Wickham, Director of Action for Refugees in Lewisham

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# Planning Voice

Our project aims to support and empower local people, particularly those from economically and socially disadvantaged communities, to be able to influence developments affecting the environment they live in.

An often overlooked area in the social justice sector, planning law has significant potential to address the structural issues affecting the housing sector.

Every missed opportunity to maximise genuinely affordable homes has real life consequences for marginalised communities and those most in need.

Southwark was the first Law Centre to focus on this area of work, and we are now aiming to share the knowledge we have

developed and encourage other Law Centres to also support their local communities.

The project was originally funded by United St Saviour's Charity. This funding was picked up by the National Lottery in 2019 and we were pleased to be awarded a further 3 years funding from April 2023.

## The project seeks to:

- Influence strategy and policy at a local and national level.
- Promote public engagement with planning and regeneration, and shape local concerns into robust planning objections.
- Scrutinise developers' planning applications and associated legal agreements with local authorities
- Bring legal challenges to planning permissions where there is insufficient public consultation or delivery of public benefit (in particular affordable housing).

- Scrutinise local authority enforcement action against breaches of planning permissions.
- Provide information, guidance and resources.
- Provide training for groups and individuals to increase skills and awareness.

## Over the past year we have:

- Ensured that Southwark Council enforces their social housing policies, for example, by objecting to developments which do not provide 25% social rent accommodation and 10% affordable housing, challenging developers who do not comply with their agreements with the Council to provide social housing, and working closely with the 35% Campaign, Tenants and Residents Associations and residents whenever planning issues arise.

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- Gained significant improvements to the New Southwark Plan for marginalised groups, Travellers and Boat-dwellers in the Borough.
- Held the Council to account over their declaration of a climate emergency, estate regeneration and the social improvement indicators of regeneration.
- Continued to monitor the independent business relocation strategy since planning permission for the Elephant and Castle shopping centre was approved.
- Supported residents to protect green space and outdoor sports facilities.

SLC was the first Law Centre to develop a planning and regeneration department and our expertise is now recognised nationally. One of SLC’s objectives is to assist and encourage other Law Centres to engage in planning law.



Working with Public Interest Law Centre, we have set up a network of Law Centres who are interested in developing this area of work, so that we can share our knowledge and expertise with them.

In January 2023 Harpreet our planning Solicitor left to work in education. We were fortunate that the different strands

of work were ably covered by Jeremy on a temporary basis until we recruited Jed as planning Solicitor in June 2023. Jeremy helped us to partner with University College London to take an intern Gabhan who has supported Jed. We hope to continue this partnership.



# Welfare Rights Unit Report

In 2022/3 the Law Centre dealt with 60 welfare rights cases (2021/2 51) We specialise in appeals to the First Tier Tribunal (Social Security and Asylum Support), Upper Tribunal, and Judicial Review cases. Legal Aid is rarely available for welfare rights cases and the Law Centre's casework was largely funded thanks to the important Southwark Council contract.

Support with accessing the correct welfare benefits underpins other areas of our work. We know from analysing the rent arrears cases that we deal with that 90% of people are either underclaiming benefits or need to challenge an incorrect DWP decision. In 2022 with funding from City Bridge Trust we appointed Daniel housing and welfare rights Paralegal in recognition of the intersectionality of these issues.

Welfare Rights also links with our immigration casework. As the Home Office tries to deal with the backlog of asylum claims, people granted refugee status have a very short time to sort out a National Insurance Number, a Bank account and to claim Universal Credit. The need for this support is increasing rapidly and if support is not provided people may end up rough sleeping.

In 2022 the Law Centre received funding to provide welfare benefits advice and representation for Lewisham residents with Sickle Cell and Simon our Supervisor was joined by Victoria as Paralegal.

Feedback from the clients accessing the service are overwhelmingly positive.

## Welfare Rights Case Study

Ms H was referred by a health professionals because her benefits had stopped following the passing of her mother, whom she cared for. Her income support ended and she was advised to claim Universal Credit and expected to seek employment. Ms H is unwell and needed support with applying as having Limited Capability for Work. The adviser supported her in

making this application and arranging for alternative payments for housing costs to be made to her landlord. Ms A now has alternative payments in place direct to her landlord and since July 2023 been awarded Universal Credit limited capability for work and work-related activity. CI now receives an extra £390.06 a month.

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SOUTHWARK LAW CENTRE



*“Wonderful programme, needed and long overdue, hopefully it sticks around after pilot”*

*“I don’t think there’s any out there at this level of support, it has been hard out here”*

*“I had already ask DWP to review my case and it was useless, felt like I hit a wall, had no idea there was a next step until I was referred to this.”*



Unfortunately the funding for the project was only for one year but because it was so successful and proved to be much needed we have continued to provide support for people with Sickle Cell, using other funding.

This project helps the Law Centre to tackle some of the inequality issues facing Black and Brown people, and we hope to continue and develop the work over the coming year.

## Welfare Rights Case Study

Ms F has Sickle Cell disease and severe mental health issues. She was referred to the Sickle Cell service by a health professional.

Ms F was receiving only Employment Support Allowance at the time of referral. On instruction it became clear that she would be eligible for an award of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) The client was supported by Vicky the Paralegal in making an application for PIP and a successful decision was received in January 2023.

Ms F was assisted to apply for a council tax exemption from Lewisham council as they were considered by their medical professional to be severely mentally unwell. This application was successful and the client has been exempted from 20/08/2015 – 31/03/2024 which totals to a liability of £9,243.51 for council tax.

With the PIP daily living and enhanced rate mobility component award Ms F will be £126.35 per week better off.

# Our Administration, Finance and IT Team

The infrastructure support team plays a vital role at the Law Centre supporting our increased number of Caseworkers. This area of support is often overlooked by funders but without IT, finance and administration support we could not



*Members of our busy admin team*

operate.

The office admin team is led by Flozel Senior Administrator, who leads on areas such as premises, and health and safety. Flozel is supported by an Administrator Tamara.

The admin team deal with a variety of tasks each day including dealing with the ever increasing volume of email enquiries, telephone calls and desperate people dropping in to seek legal advice.

We were sorry to say goodbye to Whitney, another Administrator who left the Centre in June 2023, we thank her for all her hard work and wish her all the best in her legal career.

Debbie our Legal Practice Manager ensures the Law Centre can survive by managing the ever more onerous task of legal aid billing and dealing with what feels like a never ending succession of queries and audits from the Legal Aid Agency.

Nana supports Debbie with billing and oversees our IT systems. We are all a bit lost when Nana goes on holiday.

Richard works with the Law Centre as a self-employed draft person again ensuring that we recover proper costs for our Legal Aid work.

Catherine our self employed finance person makes sure that as the money comes in it is properly accounted for. Not an easy task when we have so many different funding sources. Catherine provides a monthly cash flow projection for the Trustee Board. Lessons learnt from other organisations that have gone into administration are that this is the area we need to most closely check.

We would like to say thank you to our premises cleaner, Mosunmola who has been with the Law Centre for over 11 years and continues to work extra hard to keep our offices safe and clean.

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SOUTHWARK LAW CENTRE

# Volunteering

The Law Centre was supported by 7 volunteers over the past year. 4 of those assisted with the Windrush Justice Clinic project and 3 supported the admin team and Caseworkers with essential tasks such as research, dealing with clients and callers general administration and legal tasks delivered under supervision.

Not only do volunteers provide invaluable assistance to our team, but they also benefit from it being a great learning experience and provides valuable skills and experience that will be useful in future job searches.

*“Southwark Law Centre is full of passionate, hard-working, principled people. It was a pleasure volunteering there. I was thrown into the action, attending employment tribunals and the duty scheme. Everyone was extremely welcoming and supportive of my career aspirations”.*

*“Working as a volunteer at the Law Centre has been both rewarding and engaging, the staff are fantastic and I can see just how meaningful and impactful our work has been for those in Southwark. I feel proud that I am able to help and learn from my experience at the Centre”*

A new area for us this year was to provide placements for 2 work experience school students scheduling a week of diverse activities. Activities included observing court proceedings, shadowing Solicitors and helping with legal research.



*“I also wanted to say this week has been a pleasure to work with you and everyone at the Southwark law centre, everyone was so welcoming from the beginning and this placement has taught me so much about various areas of public law and how a law centre is run”*

A quote from a work placement pupil

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# Thank you

We would like to take the opportunity to say a huge **THANK YOU** to some of the people and organisations that have supported us and made our work possible. We could not possibly name you all !

## Thank you to our funders 2022/23:

AB Charitable Trust, Access to Justice Foundation, Allen and Overy Foundation, Baring Foundation, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital Trust, The Home Office, The Indigo Trust, King's College University, The Legal Education Foundation, London Borough of Lewisham, London Borough of Southwark, London Councils London Legal Support Trust, The National Lottery, Pathway London, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, South East London Integrated Care Service, Strategic Legal Fund Trust for London, United St Saviour's Charity, Urban Health.

## Thank to the organisations with whom we work in partnership: *These include:*

35% Campaign, Action for Refugees in Lewisham, Cambridge House Law Centre, Citizens Advice Lewisham, Citizens Advice Southwark, Claudia Jones Organisation, Community Southwark, Elim House, Futures Men, Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth, Housing Solutions Southwark, Indo-American Refugee and Migrant Organisation, JCWI, The Jigsaw Society, Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network, London South Bank University, Migrant Legal Action, MPs Neil Coyle MP; Janet Daby MP, Helen Hayes MP, Ellie Reeves MP, New Europeans, Peckham Vision, Project 17, Public Interest Law Centre, Social Integration and Regeneration Group, South London Refugee Association, Southwark Black Parents Forum, Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers, Southwark Exchequer Service, Southwark Group of Tenants Organisation, Southwark Planning Network, Southwark Refugee Communities Forum, Southwark Travellers Action Group, St Mungo's, Thamesreach, Westminster University Legal Clinic, Windrush Lives.

## Thank you for pro bono support:

Clifford Chance LLP, Hogan Lovells LLP, Gowling WLG LLP, Norton Rose Fulbright LLP, Withers Worldwide

## Thank you to the individuals who have provided support over the past year:

*Including:* Jack Carter – Architect, Gifty Edila – Vice Chair, Windrush Justice Clinic, Alex Evans – consultant, William Harwood – DWP Partnership Manager, Vicky Ling – consultant Andrew Matheson, Katherine Pitt, Sheeana Street – LBS, Melu Mekonnen – GSTT Homeless Team, Kareena Miller – Kings Homeless Team, Kyle Nicholls, Nimrod Ben Caan, Julie Bishop, Simon Brown – Law Centres Network, Pamela Robotham – Chair, Windrush Justice Clinics.

## Members of our Education Rights Project Advisory Group

## Members of the Planning Voice Advisory Group

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SOUTHWARK LAW CENTRE





# Our structure

Southwark Law Centre is governed by a Trustee Board made up of people with an understanding of the areas and community we serve. They are all volunteers and 1/3 of the Board stand for re-election at each AGM. We carry out a skills audit of the Trustees each year and if we have vacancies these can be found on our website [www.southwarklawcentre.org.uk](http://www.southwarklawcentre.org.uk)

## Current Trustee Board

Anthony Chandler (Treasurer), Vicky Fewkes, Aisling Gallagher, Stephen Lancashire, Lisa McGown, Victoria Olisa, Oliver Persey, Alex Polley (Vice Chair), John Rhodes (Chair), Katrina Thomas

The Trustee Board delegates day to day management to the Executive Director: Sally Causer

## Admin/Infrastructure Department

1 Senior Office Administrator, 1 x 3 day Legal Practice Manager, 1x 3 day IT /Billing Administrator, 1 Administrator/Receptionist, 1 part time Premises Cleaner and Volunteers

## The Immigration Department

The Department is overseen by 2 Senior Solicitors and we employ 8 full time equivalent Solicitors, 1 full time Caseworker and 1 x 2 day Paralegal

## The Windrush Justice team

The Justice team consists of 1 full time Solicitor 1 x 3 day Windrush Justice Clinic Co-ordinator and 1 x 2 day Windrush Justice Clinic Administrator

## The Housing Department

This Department is overseen by 3 Senior Solicitors and we employ 2 full time equivalent housing Solicitors, 2 housing Caseworkers, 1 full time and 1x 3 day housing Paralegals

## The Welfare Rights Department

This Department has 1 Senior Caseworker and 1x 4 day Paralegal

## Employment/Discrimination and Education Department

This Department has 1 x 3 day Senior Solicitor and 1 x 4 day Paralegal

## Planning Department

This Department has 1 Solicitor and 1 part time Paralegal





### Southwark Law Centre

Hanover Park House, 14-16 Hanover Park, Peckham, London SE15 5HG.

**0207 732 2008**

[www.southwarklawcentre.org.uk](http://www.southwarklawcentre.org.uk)

Follow us on X: **@southwarklawcen**

### Advice Services in Southwark and Lewisham

The Southwark Legal Advice Network website [www.southwarkadvice.org.uk](http://www.southwarkadvice.org.uk) has full information about advice agencies in Southwark.

The Advice Lewisham website [www.advicelewisham.org.uk](http://www.advicelewisham.org.uk) has full information about advice services in Lewisham

### Our organisation

We are a registered charity (No. 277927) and are governed by a trustee board of local people elected at our AGM by our members.

### Our Members

We are a membership organisation rooted in the local community and welcome new members, either individuals who live work or study in South East London or local charities who support our aims and objectives. We send invitations to events such as the AGM.

**If you are interested in becoming a member or would like to make a donation to support our work please visit**

[www.southwarklawcentre.org.uk](http://www.southwarklawcentre.org.uk)

