

Impact Report

2019-2020





About us

South West London Law
Centres seeks justice for
South West Londoners,
upholding their rights by
providing legal advice,
support and representation in
key areas of their lives,
including housing,
employment, debt, social
security and immigration.

Without our free or low-cost legal services, many people we help would be locked out of accessing justice because they can't afford a lawyer.

Law Centres like ours have been providing this vital service for many years and in February we celebrated

our 45th anniversary of bringing justice to our community.

Our law centres are based in Battersea, Croydon, Morden and Kingston. We support people across the six London boroughs of Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth, and in 2020 we launched a new service in Guildford, extending our work in Surrey.

In March we responded to the Covid-19 pandemic by moving our services to phone and video call to ensure people had the same access to justice.

In 2019-20, we helped **7,452** members of our community unlock justice

Life-changing help

Our team of solicitors, caseworkers and trainees provides casework and representation in areas of social welfare law.

In the past year we represented 1,758 individuals and families in cases in:

- community care
- debt
- employment
- housing
- immigration
- asylum
- public law and welfare rights



Our welfare team recovered **£1,135,515** in financial benefit for our clients.



973 people received employment advice

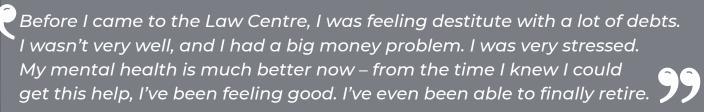


1,478 people were helped out of debt

Maryam was a victim of human trafficking in Pakistan where she was trapped in an abusive marriage for 17 years. She managed to flee to the UK with her four children, only to be refused asylum. Our immigration team took on her case and we are delighted to report that she won the appeal and has been granted leave to remain in the UK.

2

I finally have an opportunity to rebuild my life in the UK and also to provide my children with the stability they have not had for many years. They can now focus fully on their education and I myself intend to go to college and learn English so I can start making a positive contribution to the society that has given me this opportunity.



Legal advice clinics

We run one of the largest legal advice clinic services in the UK, with a team of around 400 volunteer pro bono lawyers.

Timely, accurate legal advice can prevent a problem from escalating and becoming far more damaging for an individual (and costly to taxpayers). As well as enabling clients to seek legal redress, our advice clinics give power to our clients through knowledge of the law and of their rights.

This year we continued to develop our reach by opening a new weekly clinic in Guildford Citizens Advice, and in February our pro bono work was featured in the BBC's 'One Show'.

In 2019-20, our pro bono lawyers gave over £2m of free legal advice Through our legal advice clinics, we enabled 3,975 people to understand and defend their legal rights in:



When we volunteer our gifts and legal skills to help the community, it means everyone has access to good legal representation and it starts to even out the huge power imbalance out there.
We can't solve everything, but it means one less problem someone else has to face in the world.
Chike, pro bono lawyer

From the first phone call you were all beyond helpful, every single member of your team I spoke to. You went above and beyond for me in the actual case and I have now been paid by my employer. I cannot thank you all enough, what an amazing group of people; you should be so proud of what good you're doing in the world! PS I can go and buy some food now!!!

It is with great delight that I wish to inform you that the Small Court claim has resulted in a favourable outcome for me.

After all the hard work justice has been brought about.

The right to a home

Everyone has a right to a safe home. We keep people in their homes by defending eviction proceedings and ensuring those homes are decent by getting repairs carried out. We support the homeless by ensuring local authorities accept their statutory duties to provide housing.

Our duty solicitors provided emergency legal advice/ representation to clients in three courts last year, saving many from eviction, and frequently providing pro bono benefits assistance to address underlying issues.

CC I know 100% I'm in my home because of the Law Centre

Centre, I was seriously suicidal.
I couldn't bear the thought of me and my son being on the street, but I didn't think there was anything I could do to stop it. As soon as the Law Centre took my case, I felt so relieved.
When the court eventually decided that the Council had discriminated against me, I felt like the weight of the world had been lifted off my shoulders.

In 2019-20, our solicitors provided emergency representation at court for 1,172 people facing eviction

Law as a career

As well as ensuring members of our community have access to legal advice and representation, the Law Centre is also committed to helping local people access the Law as a career. In 2019 we were delighted to welcome trainee solicitor Claudia Estephane to our housing team as a Justice First Fellow.

I was a teenage mum with my first daughter being born when I was 19. I felt I had become a statistic – a young Black girl with a baby in her teens.

Everyone said I should just go on benefits, but I knew that was not who I wanted to be.

The journey to where I am today has been a struggle. My first contact with the Law Centre was as a client – I've been homeless five times, have suffered bereavement and am living with a long-term medical condition.

When I was learning about the different areas of law, I knew I wanted to be able to help people like me. I have a passion for housing so working at the Law Centre is the perfect fit for me, and the team has been so supportive.

At the Law Centre, my caseload focuses on homelessness. I have recently had several cases involving domestic violence, all of which have led to positive outcomes for my clients. Homelessness tugs at my heart strings because I've been through it myself. I support my clients to get to safety and to keep walking to get through their situation to the other side.

In 2019-20, we also helped three paralegals further their training

Thank you...

...to everyone who has supported our work this year. Together we are ensuring justice is upheld in our community.

11 Kings Bench Walk **AB Charitable Trust** Allen & Overy **Bates Wells Braithwaite** Blackrock **Broadway Solicitors Brown Rudnick** Capsticks City Bridge Trust **Clifford Chance** Debt Free London **Eversheds Sutherland K&L Gates** Legal Aid Agency **London Borough of Merton London Borough of Croydon** Norton Rose Fulbright Radcliffes Le Brasseur Russell-Cooke Signature Law **Simmons & Simmons** The Access to Justice Foundation The London Legal Support Trust The Legal Education Foundation The National Lottery Community Fund **Trust for London Thames Water Trust Fund** Winston & Strawn



Your gift today could help more people in our communities uphold and defend their legal rights:



£10 helps someone take their first steps to finding life-changing advice



£30 provides 30 minutes' expert advice from a volunteer lawyer



£100 helps someone challenge a wrong disability benefits decision

Give online at: www.swllc.org/donate

Give by phone, by texting 'GIVEJUSTICE 5' to 70085 to give £5. Or you can choose to donate any whole amount up to £20 (eg 'GIVEJUSTICE 20')

If you'd like talk to us about giving in another way, please contact our CEO Patrick at patrick.marples@swllc.org

South West London Law Centres

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