



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.



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.



Before I came to the Law Centre, I was feeling destitute with a lot of debts. I wasn't very well, and I had a big money problem. I was very stressed. My mental health is much better now – from the time I knew I could get this help, I've been feeling good. I've even been able to finally retire.



Allen, debt client

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.

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

“Before I came to the Law 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
5th Floor, Davis House
Robert Street
Croydon CR0 1QQ

Photographs (except page 3): Geoff Crawford

Registered Charity No 1102433. Company Registered in England No 05018587. Authorised and Regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority No. 617399.
The solicitors of South West London Law Centres are regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority No. 75092.

 020 8767 2777 (9.30am - 5pm, Mon-Fri)

 enquiries@swllc.org
 www.swllc.org