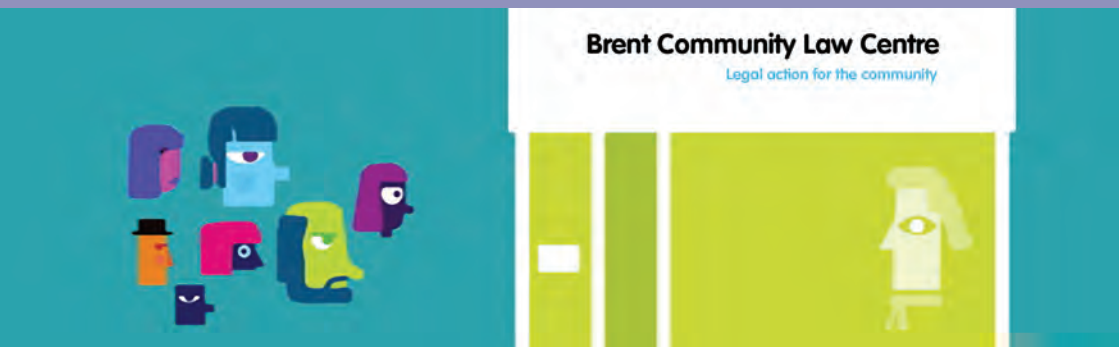


Delivering justice: Transforming lives
Annual Report summary 2008|09



Who we are

The Law Centres Federation (LCF) represents a national network of 56 Law Centres.

Law Centres are not-for-profit legal practices providing free legal advice and representation to poor and disadvantaged people. They are staffed by solicitors and barristers who specialise in the most vital areas of law for ordinary people such as housing, employment and discrimination.

Law Centres are embedded in their communities and answer to committees of local people.

What we do

Law Centres advise and represent disadvantaged people when they suffer injustice, educate people about their rights and tackle local problems. In doing so, they transform people's lives, helping them to stay in their homes, keep their families together and get into employment or education.

LCF supports, develops and champions Law Centres.



Chair's Introduction

Delivering justice: Transforming lives

This year, Law Centres continued to respond innovatively to the challenges they face. Our work has expanded and developed in several key areas. London Law Centres, working closely with LCF, are running three highly successful collaborative projects on youth homelessness, education and Employment Tribunal representation. In a survey, over 70 per cent of young people helped by the Youth Homelessness Project said that their housing situation had improved; over 40 per cent reported that their involvement in education, employment or training had improved.

Law Centres have also extended their work on discrimination and public legal education. Across the UK, Law Centres are working hard to develop effective partnerships to improve the delivery of legal services, based on a local ecology of provision.

Yet, the threats to Law Centres have not abated. By far the most prominent has been the challenge of maintaining an effective service within the constraints of the 'one size fits all' contract culture of the Legal Services Commission. This has been greatly exacerbated by the imposition of fixed

fees in October 2007, a change in the terms of payment which has stripped Centres of their cash reserves.

LCF is campaigning for a model of legal aid provision that is focussed – not on acts of assistance – but on turning people's lives around.

Legal advice and representation can change the course of people's lives, helping them to stay in their homes, keep their families together and get into education or employment. However, this is only possible if the system allows lawyers and advisers to focus on the needs of the clients they see rather than the number of clients they see. Instead of top-down reforms, LCF is calling for a strategic investment in Law Centres and other grassroots advice services, both to support and strengthen existing providers and to promote effective local networks of advice.

This Annual Report Summary 2008|09 showcases some of the highlights of LCF's work this year. Our full Annual Report is available on our website: www.lawcentres.org.uk

Nick Woolf
LCF Chair



The Young People's Project

The Young People's Project supports London Law Centres to develop young people's legal advice services. It has now been running for three years.

Case Study

Keiley Broadhead is an ex-client of Islington Law Centre's Streetlegal Project which covers five north London boroughs.

'A service like Streetlegal which is friendly and approachable is a light at the end of a dark tunnel for many young people who need help. Streetlegal was the light at the end of my tunnel when I was made homeless after my local authority repeatedly refused to help me and forever advised me to return home, even though my mother constantly refused me entry to our family home.

My school and youth workers were helpful and understanding but were unable to do anything significant with regards to my housing. My friends were always there for me to talk to but like me they were unsure of any rights I had to housing. However, Streetlegal had the

legal knowledge, resources and power to help me.

After having one meeting with Streetlegal they drafted a letter and sent it to the local authority setting out all the legal rights I had to housing and the sections of law they were breaching by refusing to house me. Such rights and laws I didn't even know existed, but once the local authority received the letter I was immediately housed.

Now, six years later, I have been living in my housing association flat for four years and am settled and successful after completing my law degree and Legal Practice Course. Being housed helped me get my life and my studies back on track and I believe that without the help I received from Streetlegal the qualifications I have achieved today would have been a distant dream for me.'

Thanks to the support of the Young People's Project, London Law Centres have supported approximately **7,000 young people**. The Young People's Project has established a pan-London **Youth Homelessness Service** and a pan-London Education Advice Service run by 14 Law Centres. Over **150 Law Centre staff** and volunteers have been supported and trained through the Young People's Project. **Over 1,000 youth advisers and other professionals** have been trained and supported by London Law Centres. **70-80 per cent** of case outcomes are positive. **73 per cent** of young people helped by the Youth Homelessness Project reported that their **housing situation improved**. **70 per cent** reported that their **safety and peace of mind improved**. **86 per cent** reported that their **knowledge of where to get help improved**. **45 per cent** reported that their **income or money situation improved**.

Law Centres transform the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged people. Here are two examples of the difference a Law Centre can make:



Sandra and Robert's Story

Sandra and Robert met on the web and hit it off. Sandra is American, while Robert is British and is quadriplegic. Eventually, they decided to meet face to face. It was a great success – they were very much in love. When Robert's carer died, Sandra decided to look after him, but the Home Office refused to extend her visa, meaning that she would have to return to the USA.

Fortunately they heard about Chesterfield Law Centre, which was able to persuade the Home Office to change its decision. The Law Centre also helped to get Robert and Sandra permission to marry. They are now happily married and getting on with their lives.

'My caseworker believed in me. She didn't give up on my situation. Without her help I would still have been homeless.' Client, Sheffield Law Centre

'I am now going to university in September – all thanks to the advice I received.' Client, London Law Centres' Youth Homelessness Project

'I am so grateful to the Law Centre, that has given me the opportunity to volunteer as a receptionist. Without the support and training from my colleagues at the Law Centre, I would not have been able to improve my English so quickly and obtain a paid job. Thanks again.' Volunteer, Chesterfield Law Centre

LCF supports, develops and champions Law Centres. Here are some examples of our work this year:

LCF champions the Law Centre model for delivering legal services.

Over the last 40 years, Law Centres have developed a model for the delivery of free legal services which enables them to transform the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

In July, LCF launched a series of YouTube videos showing how this model works. These included Maureen's story and Sandra and Robert's story opposite.

The videos were shown to an invited audience of Ministers and MPs at the House of Lords on 14 July 2009 at an event hosted by the Legal Aid Minister, Lord Bach.

'The social welfare component of legal aid is one of my key priorities. And the work Law Centres do is absolutely central to this.' Lord Bach

The event's aim was to show decision-makers that Law Centres provide a human service which changes the course of their clients' lives.

LCF supports Law Centres to be effective and sustainable organisations.

LCF facilitates regional Law Centre meetings, assists Law Centres to share best practice, represents Law Centres on national and regional forums, helps Law Centres respond to legal aid reforms, works with Law Centres to develop partnerships with other advice agencies, and works on specific projects. As part of this development work, LCF is preparing Law Centres for the complete retendering of Legal Help

Contracts in late 2009 to early 2010. One of many activities undertaken in this area this year was the training for Law Centres on 'Getting Ready for Tendering in 2010' held in July 2009 in Manchester and London.

In feedback after the London session, 100 per cent of respondents were positive about the training, and 84 per cent said they were now confident to tender.

Comments from participants included: 'Very useful, bang up to date. Helps to focus on key issues.' 'Very good training. Clarified a lot of issues. Made me aware of preparatory work I can get on with now.' 'Excellent and informative. Necessary preparation identified and explained.'

LCF's Equalities Project aims to improve access to high-quality discrimination advice.

Discrimination advice can mean the difference between keeping and losing your home, your job or your hopes for the future. In one case this year, Sheffield Law Centre helped a man with a learning disability to save his home by using the Disability Discrimination Act.

This Project is spreading the word about everyone's right to be treated equally by holding a series of awareness-raising events around the country. This public legal education takes the message to the people who most need to hear it by running training sessions and workshops with local community groups and at events such as music festivals and fairs.



Maureen's Story

Maureen lived on an estate in London, where there were a series of arson attacks. In one, she was trapped with her two young children on the seventh floor.

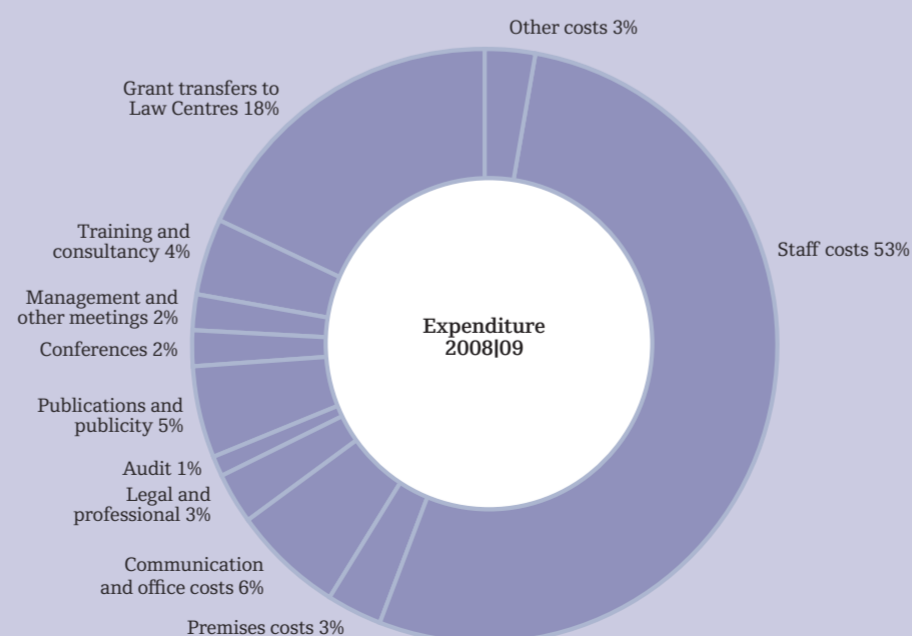
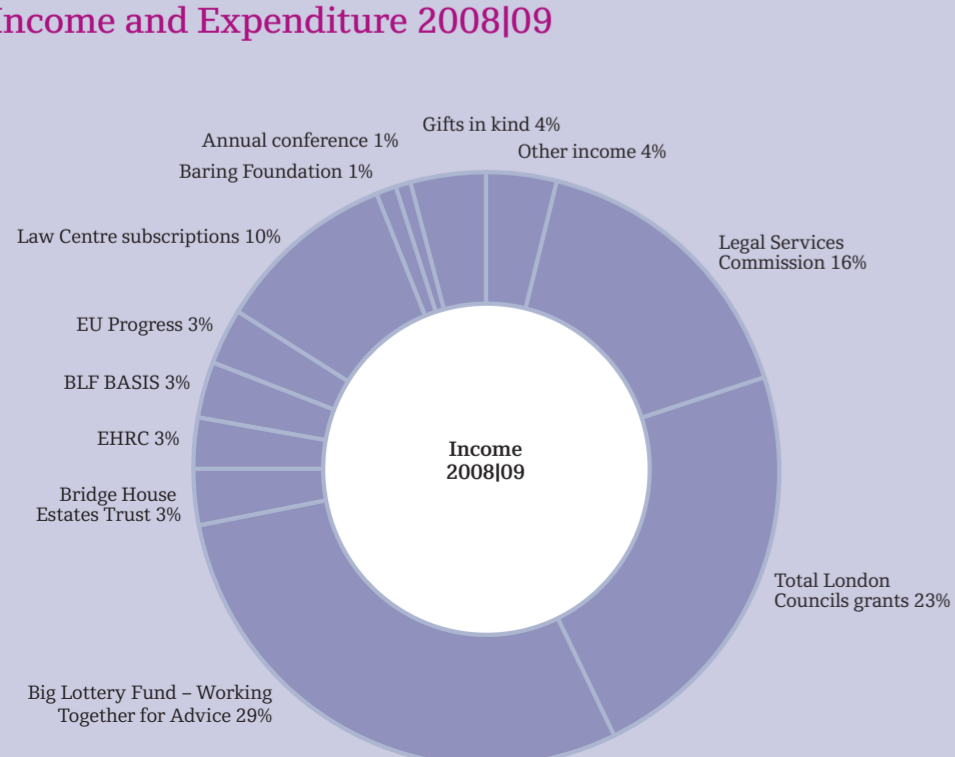
The local council did nothing. So Maureen and the other residents went to Brent Community Law Centre. There, they received advice on forming a committee to approach the council.

The residents decided to withhold rent until action was taken, but the council charged Maureen for all the residents' unpaid rent.

With the Law Centre's help, they won that case and managed to put pressure on the council to help them clean up the area.

Maureen's community spirit prompted the Law Centre to suggest that she become a lawyer herself, and so she did. After qualifying, she became one of the Centre's most valued lawyers. Their support changed not only her life, but those of her children and grandchildren who, inspired by her story, have excelled in their chosen careers. Maureen continues to work with the Law Centre, helping to turn other lives around.

Income and Expenditure 2008|09



Thank you

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Baring Foundation
Big Lottery Fund
City Bridge Trust
City Parochial Foundation
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European Union
Legal Services Commission
London Councils

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Lovells
The Honourable Society of Gray's Inn

For more information about LCF's work and to receive a full copy of the LCF Annual Report 2008|09, go to www.lawcentres.org.uk or call us on 020 7842 0720 or email us at info@lawcentres.org.uk

For every £1 spent by Law Centres on a typical housing case, £10 of 'social value' is created through benefits to the local community and savings to the government.

Every eviction avoided by Law Centres is estimated to save the taxpayer over £34,000.

www.lawcentres.org.uk

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