1979
“The impact of Law Centres has been out of all proportion to their size...” (The Royal Commission on Legal Services in England and Wales, 1979)

2008
“It is of importance to the administration of justice..., that there should continue to be Law Centres like Southwark’s which are able to offer professional help of high calibre to the neediest people.” (Lord Justice Sedley, 2008)
The Law Centres Federation is the national body for a network of fifty-five community-based Law Centres located across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Law Centres are independent charities, accountable to the communities they serve and providing a range of free legal services related to social welfare law. Law Centres adopt a strategic approach combining legal case work with public legal education and social policy initiatives.

Law Centres focus on providing legal services to people who may be marginalised in society or who are experiencing discrimination. Most of their clients are disadvantaged. Their aim is to discover the underlying causes of problems and take a holistic approach to solving those problems for both the client and the community. All Law Centres employ solicitors and many are specialists in equality and discrimination law.

A recent study by nef Consulting (New Economics Foundation) showed that for every pound spent on providing a case work service, the Law Centre generates in excess of £1.0 in benefits including savings to government.

Law Centres are funded by the Legal Services Commission and Local Councils. Community Projects are often funded by Trusts and Charities such as the Big Lottery Fund.
The Law Centres Federation was established in 1978, and this year marks its thirtieth anniversary – a good occasion to reflect on its history.

Effectively, LCF’s history goes further back than 1978, when it registered as a charity. LCF’s precursor, the Law Centre Working Group, was established in 1974, and the first Law Centres had already been hard at work since 1970. In fact, the background and context of legal aid initiatives in Britain goes back to the 1945 Rushcliffe Committee report and to the Legal Aid and Legal Advice Act 1949 that followed it. This first legal aid provision in British history reflected the vision of a fairer society that had been incubating during the war.

However, the government initially designated the work of legal aid to solicitors in private practice. This arrangement severely restricted the amount, location and extent of legal aid that was available to the poor and disadvantaged in society. In the 1960s, both major political parties acknowledged this inadequacy, while in the United States a solution to a similar situation arose in the form of ‘neighbourhood law offices’. In light of this experience the first Law Centres were set up in the UK.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the establishment of Law Centres was perceived as threatening by solicitors in private practice. It was only in 1977 that an agreement was struck with the Law Society which accommodated the existence of Law Centres, provided that their areas of specialisation not impinge on the commercial interests of private practice. With the Law Society standard waiver the way forward was open for the Law Centre movement to grow systematically and to institutionalise the co-ordination of Law Centres through the LCF.

At the time of its establishment in 1978, the Law Centres Federation included 27 Law Centres already in existence. That year the Callaghan government’s Lord Chancellor, Lord Elwyn-Jones, published a set of Guidelines for Law Centres, showing special attention to their unique work and assisting their funding. The whole field of legal services had been under review at the time by Lord Benson’s Royal Commission on Legal Services, which agreed with the need to re-examine the extent of the provision of legal aid.

The newly established LCF hit the ground running. By the end of 1978 the new Federation began circulating a new internal publication, Law Centres News; this is still going strong, familiar to today’s readers as Networking, the LCF newsletter. The following year, a Rural Conference on Law Centres was convened as part of the campaigning and development efforts of the new Federation. This work did not go amiss and by the end of 1980 the LCF could boast seven new Law Centres.

Throughout the 1980s, the Law Centres Federation enjoyed numerous achievements. Probably the two most significant ones were the continued expansion of the Law Centres network, reaching sixty centres by 1990; and the success of lobbying efforts in bringing in more funding for the movement, first from the Department of the Environment and the Greater London Council, and later from the Law Society. Another achievement in broadening government involvement was the Legal Aid Act 1988, which led to the establishment of the Legal Aid Board (now the Legal Services Commission).

In 1984 LCF moved into the London offices on Warren Street which it was to inhabit for over two decades. The following year LCF set up a short-lived additional office in Birmingham, which was replaced two years later by regional offices in Nottingham and Manchester. However, it was not until another restructuring in 1998 that LCF first appointed a director. Throughout, Law Centres had to endure recurring reassessments, increased legislation and regulation and ever-multiplying statutory bodies under the Major and Blair governments, which proved challenging to LCF as the campaigning and lobbying voice of Law Centres.

Nevertheless, LCF continued to campaign, not just for Law Centres but for the advice sector as a whole. LCF was one of the founding members of the Advice Services Alliance in 1986. A three-year environment law project at the LCF has been having a fruitful afterlife since 1994 as the campaigning legal practice EarthRights Solicitors. Most recently, in 2000 the LCF formed a partnership with the Solicitors Pro Bono Group to form LawWorks, which facilitates free professional legal advice.

In 2002, the LCF registered the name ‘Law Centre’ as a trademark. This was partly in order to secure the identity of individual Law Centres as part of an institutionalised movement. This was also done to ensure that other legal advice providers do not usurp the ‘Law Centre edge’ and its good reputation in the community and in the legal profession.

Overall, the first thirty years of the LCF have been years of growth and action, yielding some impressive achievements. Yet there is no time or cause for it to rest on its laurels, and the times ahead seem as daunting as challenges past. Still, the reward for our efforts is one worth striving towards: it is improved access to legal services and, through it, social justice in the UK.
CHAIR’S INTRODUCTION

STANDING UP FOR COMMUNITY LAWYERS

The word ‘crisis’ has been used so often over the years in relation to the funding of Law Centres that it has surely lost its impact. This year, we have had to talk not only of ‘a crisis’, but of ‘the end’ of Law Centres, as four Centres came to a literal end. Many more are on the brink. Moreover, all Law Centres face the prospect of a different ‘end’. They are being steered away from their traditional, rich mix of working methods to become standardised providers of ‘acts of assistance’.

The message from Law Centres is clear: ‘We are still in business, and we will continue doing what we can, as best we can.’ It is a tribute to the staff who work in them, that under great pressure most Law Centres are surviving and doing a magnificent job in delivering a high quality service to their communities, even if it is not as full or diverse a service as they would wish. The LCF salutes their efforts, and as this report shows LCF staff have worked harder than ever in providing Law Centres with support.

The truth is that access to justice for the most disadvantaged in our society is being diminished. The promise of ‘the rule of law’ is ringing more hollow. The credit crunch and downturn make the need for advice and casework services ever more desperate, yet the vital lifeline offered by Law Centres, advice agencies and legal aid solicitors is at breaking point.

The reforms to legal services, especially fixed fees, combined with reduced financial support from local Councils, have meant that all those who provide legal help to those who cannot afford it are struggling, and in particular the distinctive Law Centre model of public legal service delivery is being lost.

For nearly 40 years Law Centres have contributed to public legal services the idea and the reality of a team of community lawyers working in, and with, the communities that they serve. They have developed independent, elected management committees and close links with a wide range of people and groups in their localities, working with children’s centres and schools; older people’s groups; faith communities; trade unions; black and minority ethnic groups; as well as with local Councils and other advice agencies.

They have played a key role in developing legal services in their localities. They are part of, and help sustain, those networks of information and support that make cohesive communities possible. The community lawyers who work in them are inspired by the prospect of being able to use their legal expertise to defend and promote the interests of those at the bottom of our very unequal society. Most importantly, Law Centres provide in these communities the independent and expert legal assistance that is essential to the maintenance of the rule of law in our society.

LCF staff have worked tirelessly to ensure that Law Centres can thrive this year, helping individual Centres through their funding crises wherever possible, and maintaining good contact with the Ministry of Justice and the Legal Services Commission (LSC), constantly pushing for assistance to prevent further closures, but also for government to commit to a long-term funding strategy which supports the distinctive role of Law Centres.

The challenge is not simply for government. The challenge is also for staff and management in every Law Centre, and for the LCF. How much do we value the Law Centre model of public legal service provision, and how far are we prepared to stand up for the community lawyer that our movement has created? In this, I think that we have become too amenable to the agendas of others. I want to express the wish that we will all become bolder voices for the people we hope to serve.

The Law Centres Federation thanks the Law Centres, the Legal Services Commission, the London Councils, the Big Lottery Fund, the City Parochial Fund, the City Bridge Trust and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), all of whom support the LCF, financially and in other ways.

I should like to thank most warmly all the staff of the LCF whose work is described in this report. As noted above, the staff have worked harder than ever this year. I would like to thank in particular our senior management team. Julie Bishop, in her first year as Director has been first class, and has worked wonders in strengthening and steering the organisation. Special mention must also be made of Lynn Evans and Noeleen Adams who have been such stalwarts of the LCF for many years. They have provided outstanding service to the LCF and to Law Centres, and continue to do so. We are lucky indeed to have them.

John Fitzpatrick, LCF Chair
2008 marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Law Centres Federation. LCF’s 30th year has been one of its most challenging. It has been a tough year for all our colleagues in the Legal Aid Sector but it has been particularly tough for Law Centres. It has refocused attention. For the Law Centres Federation the priorities for the year have therefore been:

• to ensure the survival of each Law Centre;
• to secure the immediate, medium and long-term future of Law Centres; and,
• to strengthen and reassert the unique and vital contribution of the Law Centre model of service delivery to individuals, to local communities, to the legal sector and to the nation.

Together Law Centres are working to secure and to reshape their future. This year has seen the coming together of Law Centres at local, regional and national level to discuss and debate the survival of Law Centres and to reassert the importance of their contribution. A discussion paper has been developed that will lead into a crucial meeting of Law Centres at the upcoming national conference that will direct the work of the Law Centres Federation for the coming years.

It has also been a year of growth and internal change for the Law Centres Federation. New funding, particularly the Working Together for Advice Project, has led to the reorganisation of roles within the LCF and the appointment of new staff.

Noeleen Adams was appointed Director of Development and Support. Two staff members, Stella Russell based in Bristol and Cathy Gallagher, based outside Manchester and appointed in May, work directly with regional Law Centres across England and Wales. Myles Kunzli commenced in May to continue LCF’s work with London Law Centres.

Training provision for Law Centres has expanded with Minaxi Panchal appointed as National Training Manager. Minaxi was joined by Jennifer Ball in June as the Training and Conference Coordinator.

LCF’s Policy and Campaigning work continues, headed by Lynn Evans. Mandy Wilkins returned from maternity leave to lead the Young People’s project. The Equalities and Human Rights work, lead by Flora Williams, has expanded with work in 3 project areas: the Working Together for Advice Project, as part of the EU funded Progress project and LCF also works with Law Centres funded through the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

Nimrod Ben-Cnaan commenced in June as the Office Manager. Victor Adetiba continues as our Financial Officer. Oliver Goddard is assisting the Development team with administration for three months. I commenced in the Director’s post in mid February.

The Disabilities Rights Project concluded on 30 March and the City Parochial Foundation Research Project also ended on 30 September. Two staff members, Busayo Akinyemi and Iris Suen were unfortunately farewelled. LCF thanks them for their hard work and for their contribution to Law Centres.

Julie Bishop with Law Centre trainee solicitors

LCF Mission Statement
‘The Law Centres Federation is the voice of Law Centres®. We champion free legal advice and representation. We seek justice for the most disadvantaged in society by supporting and developing the national network of Law Centres.’

LCF Strategic Aims for 2008
• Expanding and improving access to Law Centre services to meet the needs of as many disadvantaged people as possible.
• Campaigning for change, to improve the lives of Law Centre clients.
• Creating and developing successful partnerships to further the objectives of the LCF and our members.
• Improving and maintaining the health of the Law Centres Federation in order to meet the needs of its members and their clients.
LAW CENTRES FEDERATION ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08

SHEFFIELD LAW CENTRE: STRENGTH THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Sheffield enjoys an unusually wide range of thirty not-for-profit advice centres working across neighbourhoods, areas of law and methods of advice giving, also enjoying a diverse mix of funding through local and national grants and contracts. The Sheffield advice centres had been considering forming a local consortium for some time. These plans were then extended to include the whole county, and in 2007, with the help of the LCF, Citizens Advice and Advice UK, this was established as the Community Legal Advice Service for South Yorkshire (CLASSY). For over a year CLASSY has been delivering its first contract with Sheffield City Council through ten member agencies. Funding has been received from Citizens Advice, South Yorkshire Key Fund and Lloyds TSB Foundation, and there are a number of bids pending.

Sheffield Law Centre has been at the centre of the creation of CLASSY and the Law Centre’s coordinator is CLASSY’s Company Secretary. Centres retain their independence but are finding new ways to work together to increase the efficiency of the advice sector in the city and improve the all-round service for clients. New links are being made with the private sector to encourage joint working. CLASSY has worked with the city council to streamline their monitoring requirements and look at systems which provide the information needed by the council without imposing large amounts of work on the centres. Current work involves looking at how LSC contracts could be best delivered by the not-for-profit sector in the city and preparing for the 2010 bidding round. Centres who share an interest or client group around issues such as immigration advice, black and minority ethnic communities and disability meet regularly to look at maximising resources and improving client services and there are plans for other groups to meet and possibly include attendees from the private sector. The work of widening out the consortium to the whole of South Yorkshire should take place this year.

With less funding available for advice and with the proposed changes from LSC it makes sense for advice agencies to work together. The positive experience so far gives hope that collaborative work will strengthen the organisations involved and improve the access to legal advice for the people of Sheffield.

AVON AND BRISTOL LAW CENTRE: BEYOND LEGAL ADVICE

Avon and Bristol Law Centre’s Butterfly Project was devised to cater for the needs of migrant women. It seeks to inform and advise them about all aspects of life in the UK, and improve their access to services. While some 230 women from over 30 countries have so far benefited from the Butterfly Project, the predominant client population has been that of migrant women from Somalia. Among the typical problems endured by these women are domestic abuse and the lack of official identity documents. This in turn makes it hard for these women to enjoy their right to employment, for example, or to receive some basic services such as opening bank accounts. The Butterfly Project helps Bristol’s migrant women in several different ways. Among its largest demographic, the Project works informally with women community leaders. It provides them group sessions on relevant topics from benefits to family reunions. The Project also offers individual advice to migrant women, not necessarily on legal matters but on anything that might improve their integration into UK life. Not least, the Butterfly Project communicates the needs of migrant women and advocates their interests to local and national bodies.

Funded by the Big Lottery Fund and in its third year of operation, the Butterfly Project carries out various aspects of its work in partnership with local community groups and local and national charities and agencies. In light of the project’s success, the demand in the community for the services it provides is ever increasing. It serves as a prime example of the kind of wider community involvement that Law Centres would like to be able to offer but which they are finding increasingly difficult to provide.
COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE, CARLISLE: FACING THE COMMUNITY

The second year of operation has just got underway for the Student Law Clinic set up by the Community Law Centre in Carlisle. The project, which started in October 2007, follows the model of the Student Law Clinic at the University of Kent, which is an affiliate member of the LCF. Law student volunteers have been recruited from the neighbouring University of Cumbria, to provide the local population with legal advice (initially on employment matters) and with practical legal information through leaflets, workshops and lectures. This new initiative is intended to enhance legal advice services to the local community, but also to get local students engaged with Law Centres and with social justice in general. It also fulfils the Law Centre’s aim of being a learning organisation.

The Community Law Centre also seeks to improve advice for Cumbria in general. Working together with Citizens Advice Cumbria and with Shelter, it has had a joint bid approved for five-year funding from the Big Lottery Fund to deliver a Cumbria Advice Network. The network aims to improve referral systems, partly through devising a common diagnostic tool and implementing a common booking system across advice organisations. It will also produce joint publications speaking in common terms, and will seek on the whole to provide more accessible and more coherent advice. The Community Law Centre will play the pivotal role of quality coordinator in the Cumbria partnership, responsible among other things for Specialist Quality Marks and for training. Paul im Thurn, the Community Law Centre’s manager, says that the advice network and the comprehensive and collaborative approach that underlies it “sit very comfortably with ambitions that Law Centres have had in previous decades”.

SPRINGFIELD LAW CENTRE: “NOT YOUR ORDINARY LAW CENTRE”?

Despite being one of the oldest Law Centres in the federation – it was founded in 1982 – Springfield Law Centre is considered by some as ‘not your usual Law Centre’. This might be because it serves mainly mental health service users: it is situated in the grounds of Springfield University Hospital, a psychiatric hospital in Tooting, South West London, and the majority of its clients are either in-patients or out-patients of the local mental health trust, often referred to the Law Centre by hospital staff and other mental health professionals.

Springfield Law Centre is operated by five paid staff members and one volunteer, and is governed by a volunteer management committee of interested individuals and community groups. The Law Centre offers general advice and assistance in all areas of law, specialising in housing, debt and community care advice. Client choice is considerable as advice can be accessed by drop-in service, by telephone, through an appointment system, by text/call back and by referral.

The Law Centre works carefully with other agencies to ensure that clients receive care from all appropriate local services. There is a service dedicated to Young People (ages 14-21) experiencing mental health issues, and recently services were developed to include outreach sessions on psychiatric wards at other hospital sites. Another service is the arrangement of volunteer placements for mental health service users who would like to return to work following illness.

Mental illness can make it hard to cope with day-to-day affairs: many clients are often confused, suffer from memory loss, find it hard to arrange events chronologically or simply experience communication difficulties. Lacking support in their time of weakness, clients find it hard to manage their own affairs and are faced with legal consequences. Some are unaware of their entitlement to housing benefits and so fall into arrears and face the threat of eviction. Others, being in and out of hospital, are offered unsuitable or temporary accommodation which precipitates their return to hospital or their homelessness – a common problem among mental health service users.

By providing a service which is sensitive to client needs, Springfield Law Centre aims to support and improve its clients’ well-being. This means not only dealing with legal issues but also considering preventive measures to try to avoid recurrence of problems. Therefore, wherever possible, the Law Centre will seek negotiated settlements as court proceedings are stressful for clients and can cause their health to deteriorate.

The Law Centre operates in an atmosphere of support and respect for clients who often face high levels of stress and may also experience lack of understanding, discrimination and isolation from the wider society. The onset of mental illness for many of the clients has been sudden, for instance following a trauma, post natal depression, or severe depression after the breakdown of marriage or a business. Recognising therefore that mental health problems can affect anyone at any time, Springfield Law Centre is ideally located and connected to offering a bespoke and comprehensive service to mental health service users.
NAVIGATING A PERIOD OF CHANGE

It has been a year of significant change in the Development and Support of Law Centres. The LCF restructured its Development Department and the LCF welcomed Julie Bishop as its new Director. The restructuring had a huge impact on both existing and new staff as there was little time to imbed the new structure due to external pressure from funders and government. In effect we hit the ground running.

The restructure did, however, enable us to meet a long term commitment to creating support to Law Centres in the regions outside London and our single Regional Development Consultant Stella Russell was joined by Cathy Gallagher in June 2008. Myles Kunzi joined as London Development Consultant in May. The Development and Support Team now consists of seven people (see page 10 for details).

LEGAL SERVICES COMMISSION CONTRACTING

The Carter Reforms influenced our work enormously this year. We did our best to keep abreast of the plethora of documents and policy changes announced by the Legal Services Commission and to keep member Law Centres informed. Many of the changes to the delivery of legal services under contract from the Legal Services Commission (LSC) required fundamental changes to the way in which contracts are complied with. The change from recording casework in hours to receiving a Fixed Fee per case is having serious consequences for the future of Law Centre services. We consulted with Law Centres and fed back to the Legal Services Commission their comments and criticisms. Almost 50% of our work this past year was devoted to dealing with the implications of the LSC Unified Contracts on Law Centres.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR ADVICE

What is it?
The Advice Services Alliance (ASA) has been awarded £5,714,742 by the Big Lottery Fund under the first phase of its Advice Plus programme. The funding is for three years and will deliver a multiple strand project that will provide a range of support services to independent advice centres in England.

Who’s doing it?
The project is being delivered by a consortium comprising:

- ASA
- Adviceuk
- Age Concern England
- Citizens Advice
- Law Centres Federation
- Youth Access

How will it benefit the advice sector?
The services provided under the project are delivered through eight workstreams:

- Developing access to advice
  We will look at ways of improving the accessibility of advice services to those with greatest need. This will include models of service delivery or good practice, focusing on how to improve clients’ initial contact with advice services.

- User and stakeholder involvement
  We will investigate how to increase user and stakeholder involvement in the management and development of advice services by identifying best practice through research, development of a toolkit and delivering appropriate training.
London Councils commissioning programme for the next four years began to be rolled out. London Councils are a very important funder both of London Law Centres and the Law Centres Federation London staff.

The LCF submitted a successful partnership bid with AdviceUK London for support services to advice agencies in London. Although the project started in July 2008, consultation on outcomes and delivery of the project continued into the autumn. Mandy Wilkins reports separately in this report (page 11) on London Councils-funded Law Centres’ work on youth homelessness and education advice.

The LCF is the lead organisation in a consortium of 14 London Law Centres participating in the London Law Centres Tribunal Representation Project. The project was successful in its consortium bid to London Councils, receiving £960,000 over 4 years to provide Employment Tribunal Representation Pan London.

There are now four established Community Legal Advice Centres nationally; Gateshead, Leicester, Derby and Portsmouth. Sadly we have seen the closure of Leicester Law Centre with the award of the Leicester CLAC to a multi-national private company. However Derby Law Centre merged with the CAB and was successful in winning the contract in this area.

In May, the LSC announced a further nine areas where they intend to commission with local authorities for the provision of Community Legal Advice Centres or Networks by April 2010. The Development Team has been working with the 5 Law Centres directly affected by these proposals in Manchester, Gloucestershire and Cardiff.

In Manchester, the City Council has undertaken a review of advice provision which recommended a single point of telephone and e-mail access, a single city centre service, 6 district services and one Law Centre that would provide specialist level legal interventions from a range of locations across the city. The Development Team has assisted the 3 Law Centres in responding to the review and will be supporting them through any future commissioning of services.

In Gloucestershire, the LSC is proposing to jointly commission for advice services with Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucester City Council and 5 District Councils. The LCF is supporting the Law Centre in working with the other 7 main legal advice providers in the area. The tender document is now out for consultation, with invitations to tender in March 2009 and a potential start date of October 2009.

In Wales, there is a proposal that the Local Authorities of Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend, together with the LSC, commission for legal advice services. The LCF has responded to the draft tender specification. Invitations to tender are likely to be out later this year with a view to setting up a CLAN by October 2009.

The Development Team will be working with Gloucester and Cardiff Law Centres through the tendering process. The LCF will also be supporting other Law Centres who may be interested in bidding for CLACs and CLANs. We will also be helping Law Centres establish partnerships in preparation for bidding for the April 2010 LSC contracts.

London Councils

Enhancing frontline advice
We will deliver direct support for the setting up of sustainable partnerships and advice forums and we will establish new advice centres and Law Centres.

Developing a quality mark
We aim to develop a national scheme for accrediting agencies providing advice services at the current General Help Quality Mark level.

Advice outcomes
We will help advice agencies to define, measure and evaluate the outcomes of advice work and so enable the sector to better demonstrate the value of its work.

Developing discrimination advice
We will deliver a discrimination advice training programme and establish referral networks and protocols to develop links, partnerships and referral agreements between agencies.

Workforce development and training
We will enable the sector to attract and retain staff and volunteers by accrediting trainers and developing a qualifications and accreditation framework.

Promoting advice
We will establish an annual England-wide celebration and promotion of advice services; build the capacity of advice agencies to promote their services to target groups; create generic promotion materials; and promote the benefits and outcomes of advice work to funders and other stakeholders.
A restructure at the LCF has allowed for a more consolidated and constructive approach for the delivery and availability of training and conferences for all Law Centres. This has been made possible through the creation of the posts for a National Training Manager and a Training and Conference Co-ordinator.

The Management Development Programme has now been revised and integrated from a 10 day to a 5 day programme to encourage Law Centre staffs that are short on time to attend. This should also make it easier to deliver in other parts of the country. The success of the programme can be measured by the positive transitions made by the delegates who have already attended the training from 2005 to the present.

2008 also saw the launch of the Governance training, to be made available to all Management Committee members at the beginning of 2009.

Minaxi Panchal also represents the LCF on the BLF Working Together for Advice Workforce Development work stream. This will ensure that continued efforts are made to develop a robust workforce within the voluntary advice sector; where individual skills are recognised and skills and knowledge gaps identified and filled.

The LCF continues to be flexible with their ability to provide and deliver timely training as need arises and in response to the rapidly changing environment being experienced within the sector.

This year we provided many training opportunities and 2 separate Mini Conferences for Law Centres mainly on LSC Contracting and other matters.

Participant comments on this year’s training activities include:

• Discussion also information exchange was the most useful aspect.
• Helped bring some clarity
• Good range of speakers and material
• Informative about technical detail and gives better understanding of broader context
• Will help in our development and prioritisation
• Lively and Informative
• I found it very useful and the recent changes were explained very well
• Left with a degree of greater confidence
• Useful chance to share experience and gain some reassurance
Now running for two years, the young people’s project’s key role is to support London Law Centres to develop young people’s legal advice services. Approximately 4500 young Londoners have received legal advice from Law Centres since the project began, and numerous professionals working with young people have received training from Law Centres on legal rights.

Young People and Homelessness
As a result of £1,083,912 grant funding over 4 years from London Councils we have been able to establish partnerships between London Law Centres to deliver young people’s legal advice on Housing and Homelessness matters. Led by Streetwise Law Centre and Tower Hamlets Law Centre, these projects have created South London and North/East London hubs; with 12 Law Centres delivering outreach advice services from youth venues, and training for youth workers across 24 London boroughs.

Impact on Young People
The projects are aiming to support 720 young people a year with homelessness prevention advice and support, 3000 young people directly throughout the 4 years of the project. After 9 months, over 500 young people have received legal advice with significant outcomes. Homeless young people and those at risk of homelessness have been able to access secure temporary and permanent accommodation. Tenancies at risk have been secured, and young people needing more support have been referred to appropriate support agencies. All young people supported have also received a welfare benefits check and referral to benefits experts where necessary.

Establishing a Pan-London Education Advice Service
One of the key services offered to young people by London Law Centres is education advice on school exclusions, special educational needs, bullying, and school admissions. Tower Hamlets Law Centre is coordinating 2 London Councils funded Pan London projects delivering SENDIST (Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal) and general education case work across 5 London Law Centres. These projects aim to support approximately 350 people per year.

Continuing support to individual Law Centres
We have continued to support individual Law Centres with fundraising, liaising with local youth services, meetings and follow up with Borough Directors of Children’s Services, setting up outreach arrangements, measuring impact of services and recruiting staff.

A Guide In Best Practice in Legal Outreach Services for Young People
We worked with Youth Access, Law Centres and Youth Services to research and write this guide. It will be disseminated to all Law Centres and Youth Advice projects, and to funders and policy makers.

London Youth Advice Forum and Law Centre Working Groups
We continued to coordinate the London Youth Advice Forum (with Youth Access) and the Law Centre education and immigration working groups – sharing good practice and developing joint projects.

Young People’s Participation
We arranged for LCF to be partners in Independent Academic Research Studies bid to V around youth empowerment and participation. The bid was successful and LCF were awarded £2000. The project begins in autumn 2008 and will include young people placed as volunteers/interns in Law Centres and LCF.
Public legal education (PLE) promotes access to justice by providing people with:

- knowledge about the legal system and their rights and obligations
- skills and techniques needed to prevent or resolve problems or to bring effect to statutory rights, and
- information about where and how to get legal help

In short, it develops legal capability. Importantly for Law Centres and the LCF, it also encourages our involvement in the life of the community and increasing community participation in the processes that drive social change such as law reform and community action.

PLE projects come in all shapes and sizes – they could be a campaign, an information pack, a training course, classroom teaching, a theatre production, a mentoring scheme, a website, or many other activities.

The LCF has been developing the profile of PLE this past year to support the 3-strand strategic service delivery model of Law Centres being casework, PLE and social policy.

Since the publication of the government’s report Developing Capable Citizens: The Role of Public Legal Education the LCF has been invited on to the Under-Secretary of State for Justice’s PLE Strategy Group where we have a direct influence on government policy in this area maintaining the strong community and activist perspective of Law Centres in this forum.

LCF was also invited to be a member of the steering group for the newly established PLENet – a network of PLE practitioners and stakeholders in private, government and not-for-profit sector. The aim is to promote and develop a PLE practice community as well as share and develop resources and projects.

Within LCF we have furthered our work this past year on the development of resources for the membership including:

- Practice guidelines for the management and delivery of PLE within Law Centres
- Train the trainer resources
- The production of discrimination and human rights information sheets aimed at the general public for use by LCF members and others involved in PLE activities
- Promotional resources for Advice Week including a guide for members to promote the law and their work to targeted communities and decision/policy makers
- Continued distribution of our Pride Not Prejudice DVD and Training Pack outlining sexual orientation discrimination and harassment in the workplace

Law Centres are well placed with a history and experience of undertaking strong community based public legal education. LCF will continue to be at the forefront in harnessing the government’s current enthusiasm in this area for the benefit of our communities.
To draw in additional support for the work of Law Centres from government departments and local government, the LCF started the year with a new strategic plan for policy development. One of our key objectives is to engage more with those government departments committed to alleviating poverty and disadvantage while continuing our dialogue with the Ministry of Justice about the future for Law Centres.

Widening our appeal
The LCF wants to spread the message about how community Law Centres help meet government objectives. One of the fundamental objectives of central government is to create a fair and equal society. This applies in all areas of life – in our health, our housing, our education, our care and in our jobs. It is the task of Law Centres to

• Eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality and protect human rights
• Ensure that the disadvantaged are protected and empowered
• Extend opportunity to the least advantaged to give every individual the chance to achieve their potential, free from prejudice and discrimination.
• Ensure that the disadvantaged have equal access to employment and good public services.

Fairness for all is the basis for a healthy democracy, economic prosperity and the effective delivery of public services. Poverty is often seen as one of the underlying causes of unfairness and inequality and has been linked to problems such as poor mental health, crime, poor health, inadequate housing, poor educational attainment and unemployment. These are factors that inhibit people’s ability to enjoy an equal and productive role in society.

Much of the work to tackle the multiple causes of social and economic decline has passed to individual departments and in turn local authorities who seek to improve life chances and well-being. Factors affecting the success of these strategies are the prevalence of areas of poverty and social and economic deprivation. It is in these areas where Law Centres offer advice, representation and hope.

During the year, the LCF has looked at some specific areas of common concern, such as health inequalities, domestic violence, carers, and young and older people’s needs. More than just offering legal help to individuals, Law Centres also provide legal help to frontline professionals who rely on specialist backup services.

It is easy for a legal service to be categorised into a strictly ‘legal’ pigeon hole. But Law Centres are more than that – they are looking for long-lasting positive social and economic outcomes for their local communities. They use the law to achieve these results. Working in harmony with both local and central government departments will improve outcomes for all participants and improve the quality of life for the people we serve.

“The impact of Law Centres has been out all proportion to their size, to the number of lawyers who work in them and to the amount of work it is possible for them to undertake. The volume of work they have attracted has shown how deep is the need they are attempting to meet. It has dispelled the possibility of complacency over the institution of the Legal Aid Scheme, has emphasised the importance of a wider distribution of Legal services and had shown the desirability of enabling and encouraging lawyers to take up elsewhere than in their traditional areas of activity and types of practice.”

(The Royal Commission on Legal Services in England and Wales, Final Report, October 1979)
OUR renewed funding from the Legal Services Commission for our ‘Improving Access: Improving Awareness’ project has allowed us to continue our support for Law Centres during this period of change. The project has allowed the LCF to look strategically at how to widen access to Law Centre services for the 21st century by promoting discrimination law in all the new equality strands and helping to further develop the provision of a wider range of social welfare law subjects in readiness for bidding for new contracts next year.

The need to improve access was demonstrated by important research carried out by the Centre for Employment Studies at the University of the West of England on behalf of the TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment (CoVE) this year. A comprehensive survey completed on employment rights advisers in Law Centres and CABs reported that 80% of Law Centre lawyers said they had too few advisers to deal with the number of enquiries they received about mistreatment at work.

The TUC’s Commission on Vulnerable Employment was shocked at the extent of abuses of employment rights reported by colleagues at Citizens Advice and the Law Centres. It is unacceptable that these practices exist today, and equally unfair that when they do, services to help vulnerable workers are left over-stretched and under-funded.

“Ministers have recently accepted the need for an information and awareness campaign for workers and employers on basic rights at work – which the TUC welcomes. However, sustainable funding is also needed for independent employment rights advice, so that when workers experience problems they can access support. Government, trade unions and employers need to work together to make sure this happens.

The LCF uses every opportunity it can to raise awareness of what Law Centres can offer clients and government at all levels whether this be in the UK or overseas. For example, our director spoke at this year’s International Conference organised by the Legal Services Research Centre. We have worked closely with our colleagues at the Law Society, the Legal Aid Practitioners Group and the Advice Services Alliance. Equally, we focus on communicating with our member Law Centres using webnews and by producing our bi-monthly newsletter.
SOCIO-ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF LAW CENTRES

Part of the LCF’s plan this year was to provide independent evidence on the value of Law Centre services – to clients and to government. We therefore commissioned the New Economics Foundation to carry out a research project to examine the socio-economic value of the impact of the work of Law Centres.

The research looked at the three principle strands of the work undertaken by Law Centres: Individual Casework, Legal Education and the Development of Policy and Test Cases.

The case study examined in the research was a fairly common situation where a young person became homeless and had been wrongly declared intentionally homeless by the local Homeless Persons Unit. The researchers identified the benefits and cost of Law Centre intervention. It looked at the secondary stakeholder, the government - in terms of other services that would have been needed if there had been no intervention. The researchers then looked beyond these outcomes to the impact on the family and on wider society. Resulting from these, the study calculated that for every £1 spent on service provision by Law Centres, at least £10 is generated in benefits to society and saving for government.

The second example examined a legal education programme to educate individuals and groups of their legal rights to prevent evictions. The far reaching impact of an eviction was revealed.

One of the outcomes identified in the example was the deterioration in school performance of the child of the family under threat of eviction. There is the possibility that the effects of an eviction on a child could also result in separation from their parents and/or deterioration in their behaviour to the point that they become involved in criminal behaviour. In the case of the latter, then, a host of additional costs to the state in the form of police and court time would need to be accounted for. For the parents, the research found that there was likely to be a decline in well-being (physical and mental) resulting from poor quality temporary accommodation or sleeping on friends’ floors. This decline in well-being could include back pain (from sleeping on sofas), chest conditions (from overcrowded, poorly ventilated accommodation) and stress from the temporary nature of their accommodation conditions.

Copies of the full report can be obtained from the LCF.
Funding from the Big Lottery Fund has enabled us to create a new equalities post at LCF to build on work done in the SORBAE and Disability Rights Projects.

Flora Williams came into post in January 2008 as our Equality and Diversity Manager, to take forward the discrimination workstream of the Working Together for Advice (WTFA) project and to work with Law Centres to support caseworkers and work funded under the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) interim grants.

Discrimination Workstream of WTFA Project

LCF is working with other advice sector networks to build the infrastructure of advice services in order increase the capacity of advice organisations to deliver discrimination advice.

The main areas of work will focus on identifying gaps in discrimination advice across England, developing a training programme for discrimination advisors at all levels and a good practice model for discrimination advice referral.

As part of the initial work on the project, we conducted a mapping exercise of discrimination advice provision amongst members of all funded networks (AdviceUK, Citizens Advice and Law Centres Federation). Initial results from this exercise indicate that there are still significant gaps in discrimination advice provision across England. For example, two thirds of Law Centres who responded have said that they had to turn away clients or to signpost them to other services because they had no capacity to take on more cases. Another main area of development stems from the workers’ recognition that they need to increase their knowledge and expertise in using human rights-based approaches to discrimination casework and representation.

The WTFA project presents an opportunity for the sector to work closely together and to develop materials and resources relevant to its work.

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Co-ordination Project

LCF received £35,000 to support Law Centres with EHRC grants. Quarterly meetings are held during which workers share information, support one another and are updated on developments in discrimination advice in their regions. Two training courses were prioritised and run for workers in June and September 2008: CPR training was held in June, and Goods Facilities and Services training in September. Feedback from the training courses included comments such as “comprehensive and very helpful”, “extremely useful training”, and “worthwhile and practical”.

EU-funded Progress Project

LCF are partners in an awareness raising project funded by the European Union. The project produces public information materials focusing on aspects of discrimination and how people can take action themselves. Also in production is a website focusing on questions from members of the public, where guidelines are given to help them solve their discrimination problems.

5 conferences were held across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, bringing discrimination advisors together to discuss regional issues in the provision of discrimination advice and their impact upon advice work.

In these regional conferences, Law Centres took part in the delivery of workshops. This included the Central London Law Centre’s contribution to the London conference; and the contribution of Chesterfield and Kirklees Law Centres to the Manchester conference.
On 30 March 2008 the Disability Rights Project concluded. The Disability Rights Project was an England wide project in which the Disability Rights Commission (now merged into the new Equality and Human Rights Commission) funded 13 full time Disability Rights Workers (DRWs) based in Law Centres. The Project ran for two years and commenced in April 2006. The aim of the Project was to create a higher profile for disability rights issues and carry out a casework service, particularly in relation to Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).

The Law Centres engaged in the Project were: Avon & Bristol, Camden, Chesterfield, Coventry, Gateshead, Kirklees, Leicester, Luton, Newcastle, Rochdale, Sheffield, South West London, and Trafford Law Centre. The Disability Law Service also participated in the Project.

On average, Law Centres delivered 910 hours of casework and opened 58 individual cases, significantly over the requirement of the contract. Together they delivered 358 public legal education sessions in relation to disability discrimination around the country.

The Disability Rights Project was an important step in the development of the Disability Discrimination Act by informing the public of its application, improving understanding of its implications and assisting those being discriminated against because of their disability.

To enable people living with disability to fully assert their rights employers, service providers and the general community need to learn about and understand their obligations and rights under the Act. Importantly though, it is not enough to educate. For the law to be effective and for people to trust that it will provide protection, cases have to be taken and won to prove it. Through the combination of education and casework undertaken as part of this project, the Disability Discrimination Act was significantly strengthened and the rights of people living with disability further asserted. The Law Centres Federation congratulates the Law Centres and people involved in this project.

A copy of the project’s final report can be obtained from the LCF.

CAMDEN COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE

Camden’s DRW developed a training pack on hidden disabilities with the Courts Services Regional Diversity Manager aimed at the Disability Contact Officers within the Courts. Together they delivered three workshops in September 2007 and a further two in October 2007. The participants came from the Crown Courts, County Court, Magistrates’ and the Royal Courts of Justice.

The aim of the Hidden Disability Workshop was to broaden knowledge about particular disabilities and provide participants with the skills to manage the disability issues that may arise in their courts and offices. The participants were particularly interested in how to offer assistance without offending customers and how to encourage reluctant and busy court staff to help with filling in of forms. Following the course the Regional Diversity Manager said ‘Yesterday’s evaluation figures are particularly impressive! The overall summary is also impressive….thanks again for all your help with the courses.

ROCHDALE LAW CENTRE

‘District Judge Viv Reeves, sitting at M old County Court, has ordered supermarket giant Tesco to compensate a disabled motorist after they refused to check her tyre pressure at their petrol station for “health and safety reasons”. Jenny Crowley, who suffers from a condition that causes muscle pain, asked staff to help put air in customers’ tyres because a fatality may result if a motorist was not be covered by insurance if dealing with tyres. The court ruled that Tesco had acted in a discriminatory manner and awarded Ms Crowley £1,000 compensation.”

AVON AND BRISTOL LAW CENTRE

Avon & Bristol Law Centre dealt with a claim by a wheelchair user against Her Majesty’s Court Service under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 for damages and a declaration. The client had experienced problems in accessing both services and courtroom in the Magistrate’s Court, The Guildhall, Market Square, Salisbury, Wiltshire in Summer 2006.

Legal representation was initially refused but later granted after a successful referral to the Public Interest Advisory Panel which concluded that the case had significant wider public interest (see http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/docs/new s/Focus_55_Dec07.pdf). The client’s case was settled (approved by the court on 13th June 2008) and compensation paid by HMCS. The magistrate’s court agreed to alter the information it gave out on its summonses, and agreed that anyone experiencing access problems when visiting a hearing should contact them and an alternative court would be used.
This year saw the Law Centres Federation successfully managing the threat to our traditional funding streams (the Legal Service Commission and London Councils). Funding for the Disability Rights project through the Disability Rights Commission (now the Equalities and Human Rights Commission), was extended by six months to the end of the financial year. Against this background, total turnover was increased by 5%; and for each of the above, the Law Centres Federation has managed to extend funding for one year or more.

There was a small reduction of total Reserves of about £2,000. This was due mainly to projects coming to the natural end of their funding streams. Overall, Restricted Funds fell by £11,000 whilst Unrestricted Funds increased by £8,000 over the last year. The LCF still plans to develop free Reserves in line with its maintained policy.

Following the end of the successful Sexual Orientation, Religious Belief, Age and Employment Equality (SORBAEE) project, sufficient funds were found from residue funds to provide a number of the successful DVDs in response to further requests.

The ending of the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) Community Fund grant in May 2007, left a gap in funding, which was met by LCF in order to maintain services for regional development support to those Law Centres outside London. The loss of the original Big Lottery Fund funding was mitigated by the introduction of the Big Lottery Fund AdvicePlus funding stream.

January 2008 saw the start of the new Big Lottery Fund project; Working Together for Advice (WTFA). This project, as part of a consortium, led by the Advice Services Alliance (ASA) for the next three years brings an additional £300,000 per annum to the LCF, and requires three additional staff covering training, equalities, and development and support to members.

The Young People’s Project, funded by City Bridge Trust, has continued to be successful in co-ordinating services for young people across London Law Centres, and in its attempt to persuade government into a long term commitment to legal services aimed at young people in support of accessing their rights.

Funding from City Parochial Foundation for a research and policy post for London ended in September 2008.

The Disability Rights Project funded by the Disability Rights Commission ended in October 2007 but we were delighted that the new Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) made a commitment to continue the funding until the end of March 2008. This had funded a worker at the LCF and 14 caseworkers based in Law Centres. At the end of the year EHRC invited applications for funding from their Interim Grants Programme for 2008/09 and we were pleased that 23 Law Centres were successful in their bids. The LCF also received a one year grant of £35,219 to raise awareness of equalities and human rights through public legal education.

At the end of March 2007, our funding stream from the Legal Services Commission (LSC) came to an end, but we were able to take advantage of a new Community Legal Services funding programme introduced by the Commission at the end of 2007. Our application to run an ‘Improving Access: Improving Awareness’ project was successful. Our grant from the Commission was a little smaller than we had hoped; however, our award of £498,000 over the next three years is very welcome and we thank the LSC for their continued support.

Funding from London Councils supports services delivered by the LCF to London Law Centres. The London Council’s funding stream was re-commissioned in June 2007, and the LCF entered into a partnership with AdviceUK to deliver the project outcomes. Further funding from London Councils was secured under their second-tier support to front-line providers programme. With this funding the LCF is able to assist Law Centres who are in receipt of London Council funding. This comes into force in February 2009. Overall, our funding from London Councils increased by some 21%.

We would like to thank all our funders and look forward to continuing these productive relationships in future.

Sean Canning, LCF Treasurer
This summarised financial information contains extracts from the statement of financial activities and balance sheet for the year ended 31st March 2008, but this is not the full statutory report and accounts. The full financial statements were approved by the trustees on 3 November 2008 and subsequently submitted to the Charity Commission and Companies House. They received an unqualified audit report and copies may be obtained from the charity’s head office.

Signed on behalf of the trustees on 3 November 2008.
LCF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND STAFF

LCF Executive Committee 2007/08

John Fitzpatrick OBE  Chair  Management Committee  Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre
Michael Ashe     Vice Chair  Staff  South West London Law Centres (Resigned July 2008)
Reita Clarke MBE  Vice Chair  Management Committee  Luton Law Centre
Maureen Vincent  Secretary  Staff  Brent Community Law Centre
Sean Canning     Treasurer  Staff  North Kensington Law Centre

Management Committee Representatives

Cameron Philpot  Chesterfield Law Centre
Richard Palmer   Southwark Law Centre
Nick Woolf       Saltley and Nechells Law Centre
Ruth Appleton    Hackney Community Law Centre (Elected June 2008)

Staff Representatives

Keith Bennett    Cambridge Law Centre/Advice for Life
Ruth Hayes       Islington Law Centre
Laura Melbourne  Surrey Law Centre
Teresa Waldron    Chesterfield Law Centre
Nick Whittingham Kirklees Law Centre

LCF Staff

Noeleen Adams    Director of Development and Support
Victor Adetiba   Finance Worker
Jennifer Ball    Training and Conference Co-ordinator (Joined June 2008)
Nimrod Ben-Cnaan Office Manager (Joined June 2008)
Julie Bishop     Director (Joined February 2008)
Lucy Bush       Temporary Administrator (Left May 2008)
Devi Clark       Interim Director (Left February 2008)
Lynn Evans      Policy Manager
Cathy Gallagher  Regional Development Consultant, North (Joined June 2008)
Oliver Goddard  Temporary Administrator (Joined September 2008)
Myles Kunzli    Development Consultant, London (Joined May 2008)
Minaxi Panchal  National Training Manager
Stella Russell  Regional Development Consultant, South
Iris Suen       London Research and Policy (Left September 2008)
Mandy Wilkins  Young People’s Project Manager
Flora Williams  Equality and Diversity Manager (Joined January 2008)

LCF staff can be contacted by email using their first name followed by @lawcentres.org.uk, e.g. noeleen@lawcentres.org.uk
We are also indebted to the generosity of our supporters:

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The Honourable Society of Gray’s Inn
This annual report can be made available in alternative formats on request

LAW CENTRES FEDERATION
293-299 Kentish Town Road
London NW5 2TJ

Tel: 020 7428 4400
Fax: 020 7428 4401
Email: info@lawcentres.org.uk
Website: www.lawcentres.org.uk

Company Number 2433492
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