

NORFOLK COMMUNITY LAW SERVICE



Annual Report
2016/17

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Norfolk Community Law Service and NCLS are both operating names of Norfolk Community Law Service Ltd

Registered under guarantee in England under Company No. 3524607. Charity No. 1069066

Authorised by the OISC to provide immigration advice and services Ref. No. N201200043

Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority Ref. No. 620093

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Board of Directors

Benedict Keane, Chair

John Ceybird, Company Secretary & Honorary Treasurer

Ejike Ndaji, Honorary Secretary

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Chris Cubitt

Gordon Dean

Liz Edwards

Richard Goodall

Annie Grant

Vanessa Morton

Michael Pendred

Margaret Sparrow

Andrew Spencer

Paul Steward

Volunteer Solicitors (See Free Legal Advice & Domestic Abuse Reports)

Other Volunteers

Nicholas Anning

Simbi Anzaya

Stacey Ashworth

Caroline Ball

Joanna Babuich

Jessica Bailey

Andrea Bailiss

Molly Barker

Stiofain Barker

Lauren Beldom

Jane Bevan

Rachel Bradshaw

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Sarah Blunden

Emily Bowcher

Alex Christian

Jade Clark

Ellen Connolly

Alice Cropper

Erin Davies

James Dodson

Emma Dubar

Sally Earl

Beverley Easter

Charlotte Elwell

Elizabeth Foster

Rebecca Fountain

Emily Frost

Melissa George

Katie Gordon

Deryn Hall

Callum Harris

Olivia Heading

Sarah Hitchcock

Bradley Hoare

Joshua Hoare

Georgia Hunt

Rob Ireland

Lucas Johncey

Chris Jones

Thomas Julian

Charlotte Kearsey

Emma Kiczma –Walsh

Nora Koskinen

Estera Kozłowska

Bartosz Kubiak

Jacob Lawrence

Dani Lewis

Philip Livesey

James Mace

Huiling Mah

Haramboure Maylis

Sophie McAllistair

Jennifer Mgbobukwa

Mark Miller

Thomas Miller

Faye Milton

Sophie Newman

Katherine Newson

Emma Newstead

Genevieve Norris

Anu Oladapo

Roshni Pandya

Nidhi Parekh

Sophie Parkinson

James Pettit

Chrissy Pilbrow

Staff

Ros Brown, Chief Executive Officer

Julie Bennett, Finance & Administrative Officer

Rebecca Branson, Administrative Officer

Sarah Clack, Operations Manager

Andy Cobb, Debt Adviser

Susan Craddock, Debt Caseworker

Joanne Freeman, Administrative

Carol Gormal, Debt Caseworker

Hannah Hill, Family Court Support Service Co-ordinator

Rob Ireland, Welfare Benefits Adviser

Judi Lincoln, Advice and Volunteer Manager

Des McKeating, Migrant Worker Co-ordinator

Janka Rodziewicz, NCAN Strategy Manager

Tamsin Roques, Family Court Support Service Co-ordinator

Charlie Sayer, Welfare Rights Manager

Mariah Simms, Trainee Solicitor

Hana Suzuki, Migrant Worker Adviser and Administrative Officer

Sam Willis, Legal Assistant

Mary Podd

Holly Postle

Sive Poto

Sam Poulter

Michael Pyefinch

Rosie Reynolds

Maria Rumbol

Helen Ranson

Tamsin Roques

Anne Saunderson

Darshy Sivananthasanthony

Alex Smith

Penny Steward

Sebastian Teterra

Lucy Thacker

Gabriella Traynor

Sam Varney

Raina Victor

Andrew Wells

Cara Walker

Olivia Whitehorn

Lauren Wonfor

Mary Wood

Elliot Wotton

Tom Wright

Jake Young

Ellie Yusuf-Osman

Patrycja Zeleznik

Norfolk Community Law Service Limited (NCLS) was originally founded in 1985 under the name Norwich and District Legal Services and was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status in 1998. The objectives of NCLS are to identify unmet legal need within Norfolk and find ways to provide free services to meet those needs.

Chair's Report



Left: Benedict Keane,
Chair, NCLS Board of Directors

In 2016/17 we saw a further increase in the number of clients seeking advice combined with an increase in the complexity of the issues involved. We saw a total of 2,493 new clients in 2016/17, a 6.7% increase on the previous year. We have continued to review and develop our service delivery in order to try to meet this demand.

The major factors continuing to drive this increase in demand are the impact of the legal aid cuts, changes in welfare benefits and reductions in public expenditure which are both impacting on clients' income levels but also reducing the funding for advice provision across the sector. We are increasingly seeing clients experiencing debt and rent arrears resulting from the impact of the Benefit Cap, sanctioning and the so called 'Bedroom Tax' and, more recently, the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit.

Although in theory there is still some legal aid for domestic abuse, there are fewer solicitors in Norfolk providing legal aid so clients who are eligible are not always able to access the support they need.

We successfully applied for a Justice First Fellowship from the Legal Education Foundation which provides funding for two years to train a solicitor as part of a national initiative to encourage law students to take up social welfare law. Our new Trainee, Mariah Simms, took up the post in January 2017 and spent six months working with the NCLS Welfare Benefits Team and is now on a placement with Shelter. We are planning further placements with local solicitor firms and NPLaw. The project is being run in partnership with the Mancroft Advice Project (MAP) and Mariah's dissertation will focus on the provision of legal advice for young people.

We increasingly rely on the contribution of volunteers to support the delivery of all our services for which we are extremely grateful. We have 65 solicitors who advise our clients on a pro bono basis as well as about 45 law students, mainly from UEA. We are delighted to have renewed our partnership agreement with UEA and are looking forward to contributing to the development of their Law Clinic. The outstanding student contribution continues to be the Welfare Benefit Service where students represent clients at Tribunal and have a great deal of success in winning appeals. We also have a number of experienced 'Community Volunteers' and of particular note is the complexity of the work undertaken by the Family Court Support Service volunteers who deal with very difficult and often very emotionally distressing cases.

It is particularly pleasing to see the increasing recognition of the contribution which the Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN), of which NCLS is the lead agency, makes to the delivery of social welfare advice services in Norfolk and this contribution has recently been rewarded by NCAN being invited to work with the County Council to develop future advice provision in Norfolk.

We have again had a relatively successful year in terms of securing funding both towards the cost of our existing services as well as new initiatives. We are extremely grateful to the substantial funding we receive from Norwich Consolidated Charities as well as the continuing financial support we receive from Norwich City, Broadland and South Norfolk Councils, UEA, the Access to Justice Foundation, Money Advice Service, Comic Relief, the Big Lottery, the A B Charitable Trust, Geoffrey Watling Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation, Resolute Community Fund, Cromer Town Council and Victory Housing Trust. Thanks also to our landlords Voluntary Norfolk.

I would like to thank Vanessa Morton, Chair of the NCLS Supporters Group, for organising a number of successful fundraising events, including our annual law lecture in October delivered by Vera Baird QC, Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria, on Violence and Abuse against Women and Girls. Thanks also to William Armstrong, our Honorary President, for all his support.

Finally I would like to thank all our staff and volunteers, as well as my fellow Directors, particularly John Ceybird for his support for our financial affairs. We were very sad to lose Richard Goodall, our Vice-Chair, who had been with us for many years and thank him for his immense contribution to the work of NCLS.

Benedict Keane
Chair, NCLS Board of Directors

Treasurer & Company Secretary's Report



Left: John Ceybird,
Honorary Treasurer & Company Secretary

I am pleased to report that prudent financial management has resulted in a satisfactory financial outcome for the year to 31 March 2017. The continuing expansion of NCLS's services is expressed by the increase in expenditure from £395,514 in 2015/16 to £414,426 in 2016/17. The increase in service provision is shown by our largest single expense, staff and sub-contract labour costs, which are up by 16% from £291,199 to £338,630, reflecting the development of our Welfare Benefits and Family Court Support Services, as well as the employment of a Trainee Solicitor from January 2017.

Income has increased from £381,021 to £392,222, which includes funding paid in advance that will be expended in the current financial year. Our income principally derives from grants received, which are detailed elsewhere in the Annual Report. In addition, we have received donations from private individuals, and our Supporters Group continues to make a valuable contribution to our funds.

The outcome of the year was a deficit of £22,204 (compared with a deficit £14,493 for the previous year), which has been financed from our revenue reserves. At 31 March 2017, the reserves of NCLS comprised capital reserves of £1,106 (which represent the undepreciated value of our office furniture and equipment) and revenue reserves of £127,752. These reserves provide coverage for three months budgeted expenditure for the current financial year to 31 March 2018 and so comply with the Board's policy of maintaining

sufficient funds in hand to cover three months' budgeted expenditure.

Nevertheless, there is a continuing requirement for the Board to secure funding for the future operations of NCLS, which we are hoping to develop to meet increased demand. The Directors are conscious of their responsibility to monitor the ongoing financial position of NCLS, which is reviewed at each Board meeting. In particular, the Directors continue actively to seek funding to meet for the core costs of NCLS.

Finally, I wish to point out that the financial accounts of NCLS do not reflect the value of the time committed to our work by our volunteers and supporters, including local firms of solicitors and UEA students, without whose unpaid work NCLS would not be able to function.

John Ceybird
Honorary Treasurer & Company Secretary

NCLS Financial Summary from 2012-13 to 2016-17					
Year to 31 st March	16-17	15-16	14-15	13-14	12-13
	£	£	£	£	£
Income	392,222	381,021	376,586	354,669	273,128
Expenditure	414,426	395,514	361,055	320,681	260,638
of which: Staff Costs	338,630	291,199	265,020	232,114	194,493
% of total expenditure	82%	74%	73%	72%	75%
Revenue Reserves at Year End	127,752	150,052	158,348	139,008	102,595

Report of the Chief Executive Officer



Left: Ros Brown,
Chief Executive Officer

Over the last year we have faced a continuing increase in the numbers of people seeking advice as a result of the cuts to legal aid and welfare benefits as well as reductions in public expenditure. We helped a total of 2,493 new clients in 2016/17 compared to 2,336 in 2015/16, a 6.7% increase. These figures do not accurately reflect the workload impact of the complexity of issues which clients are presenting with. Many have multiple issues and need support from more than one service. The figures also do not include work we undertook for existing clients.

Whilst we have endeavoured to accommodate this increased demand, our resources are limited and on occasions we have had to turn clients away or delay appointments. In terms of service expansion, we are constrained not only by shortage of funding but also by limited office space. We have carried out much needed improvements to our reception area and are reconfiguring the layout of the main office to create additional desk space.

Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN)

NCAN has continued to play an increasing strategic role in influencing social welfare advice provision in Norfolk thanks particularly to the efforts of Janka Rodziewicz, the NCAN Strategy Manager, and Kate Kingdon, the Specialist Contracts Group Partnership Lead. This has recently been formally recognised by Norfolk County Council's offer of funding towards the cost of maintaining

and developing the NCAN electronic client referral system and also the invitation to Janka and Kate to work with County officers on the development of their future advice strategy. This is being linked to the County's work with the health sector to develop social prescribing i.e. the recommendation by GPs of non-medical interventions for their patients e.g. debt advice. As part of this initiative, the County has agreed not to proceed with planned cuts to their advice budget of £200,000.

The common health and wellbeing outcomes framework for the advice sector, which NCAN has developed and continues to support, has evidenced the benefits of timely advice in preventing more costly crises not only for the health sector but also the public sector generally e.g. by reducing homelessness.

NCAN has been gaining recognition at national level as a good model of partnership working, not only between advice agencies themselves but also with the public sector which ensures best use of limited resources in securing improved outcomes for clients.

Family Court Support Service

One of the main initiatives we have developed in response to demand is our Family Court Support Service to help clients seeking contact with their children following a relationship breakdown. As well as seeing clients before they attend Court, in January 2016 we also started a Family Court Desk Service to help those who turn up at Court without a representative. The funding we secured from the Access to Justice Foundation and the Resolute Community

Fund enabled us to recruit a part time Co-ordinator, Hannah Hill, to manage the volunteers who deliver this service as well as co-ordinate future service development.

We are very grateful to family solicitor volunteer, Rebecca Calthorpe, who is supporting this service for one day a week and particularly providing advice for domestic abuse clients who, as referred to elsewhere, although often eligible for legal aid are not able to access such support because of lack of provision.

Norwich City Council Financial Inclusion Consortium

The City Council have continued their funding of the Financial Inclusion Consortium involving the provision of services including debt, housing and welfare benefits by Age UK Norwich, Equal Lives, MAP and Shelter with NCLS as the lead agency. We are currently working with the Council to identify areas where they might improve their systems and procedures to both reduce the initial demand for advice as well as responding more effectively to issues raised by advice agencies on behalf of their clients in order to secure improved outcomes for clients.

Skyping

In order to make best use of our advisers' time as well as to overcome issues around rural isolation, we have been increasingly developing the provision of advice via Skype. We have regularly used Skyping to triage migrant worker clients in Kings Lynn and have recently extended this initiative to our Domestic Abuse Service where the solicitor volunteers use Skype to advise clients at

Providing Access to Justice & Equality

Dereham CAB. This is particularly useful for clients who are trying to protect their movements from abusive partners.

Welfare Benefits Service

The Welfare Benefits Advocacy Team, comprises law students working with Welfare Rights Manager Charlie Sayer and UEA law graduate Rob Ireland, as well as a number of experienced community volunteers, had a 19% increase in client numbers compared to 2015/16. Clients are increasingly being referred from partner agencies who either do not have the resources to help them or have long waiting lists. Demand is likely to increase further as Universal Credit is rolled out more widely. The Team continues to achieve a high rate of success in overturning appeal decisions and secured benefit payments for clients of nearly £1.2 million in 2016/17.

Migrant Worker Project

Both before and after the EU Referendum in June 2016, we saw an increase in the numbers of EEA Nationals seeking reassurance about their right to remain in the UK. What has been concerning is the drop in demand from migrant workers seeking support to access benefits they are entitled to which we assume is because they are concerned about jeopardising their right to remain. We are delighted that one of our Administrative Officers, Hana Suzuki, passed her OISC examinations, enabling her to take up the vacant post of Migrant Worker Adviser for two days a week.

Debt Advice Service

Although in 2015 the Money Advice Service (MAS), the main funders of our Debt Service, agreed that the service no longer had to be restricted to offenders and their families, we still target this group but also target other vulnerable clients with complex needs e.g. people with mental health or learning difficulties. MAS continues to only renew our funding on a six monthly basis and we have no certainty of funding beyond March 2018 which is very unsatisfactory. We continue to seek funding from other sources to enable us provide the holistic casework service our vulnerable clients need. We have developed a

new model of service delivery in partnership with the Shaw Trust whereby we advise clients in Bure and Wayland Prisons by telephone with some e-mail communication with the offender managers which is producing more successful outcomes for clients than previous initiatives we have trialled.

UEA Law Students

We continue to rely heavily on the UEA law students to support the delivery of all our services and are grateful to Claudina Richards, Gareth Thomas and Amanda Dorr of the UEA Law School for their continuing support. We are delighted to be working in partnership with the Law School to develop their Law Clinic at Earlham Hall which will provide much needed accommodation for our students to undertake casework and prepare legal submissions on behalf of our clients. Thanks go to Judi Lincoln, our Advice and Volunteer Manager, for all her work with all the volunteers. Our thanks also go to volunteer Bill Edmonds for his significant contribution to student recruitment and mentoring of volunteers.

We were delighted this year when one of our first UEA law student volunteers, Naomi Newell, returned to volunteer for our Free Legal Advice rota having successfully qualified as a solicitor and hope other former students will follow.

Quality Mark Audit

We were pleased to secure renewal of our Advice Quality Standard with Casework in Debt and Welfare Benefits in April 2016.

Funding and Future Service Development

Our main priorities for 2017/18 are to obtain more sustainable funding for all our services as well as to continue to develop service provision to meet increased demand. We are hoping that our recent work to produce improved evidence of the effectiveness of our services in improving health and wellbeing, reducing debt and homelessness, etc. will help us to access more sustainable funding.

The recent Supreme Court's judgement that the fees for taking a case to an Employment Tribunal introduced by the Government in

2013 were unlawful is very welcome. There had been a 79% drop in the number of cases taken to Tribunal since the fees were introduced meaning that many employees with genuine grievances against their employers had not been able to exercise their right to justice. Although we had done our best to help such clients, without the threat of a Tribunal case that help has been limited. This judgement means we can now move forward with the proposal to use law students, under supervision, to represent cases at Employment Tribunals.

We are hoping to secure funding to continue to employ our Trainee Solicitor, Mariah Simms, when she has completed her two year training contract funded by the Legal Education Foundation (LEF) and also hope to be able take on additional trainees in the future. If the lack of legal aid provision for domestic abuse continues, we will also explore the possibility of securing funding to employ a part time solicitor for this purpose.

We are hoping to secure Level 2 OISC accreditation which will enable us to provide immigration advice in relation to domestic abuse issues as well as asylum cases which we are not able to do at the moment.

We are very grateful to all our funders (see Page 22) for their support, particularly Norwich Consolidated Charities, Norwich City Council, UEA, Comic Relief, MAS, the Access to Justice and Legal Education Foundations. We are pleased to be included as partners in the MAP and Mid-Norfolk CAB 'Help Through Crisis' Big Lottery projects.

I would like to thank all the NCLS Board members for their support as well as all the NCLS staff and volunteers for their continued hard work and commitment in dealing with their ever increasing workloads.

Ros Brown
Chief Executive Officer

clientfeedback

Of those FLA clients who completed our User Feedback Questionnaires, 80% felt better informed about their rights and options, over 85% felt the information and advice was given in a clear way and 95% felt the service was welcoming and approachable.

Comments received included:

'Excellent helpful service!'

'Received excellent advice and have a clear way forward with things.'

'Very professional service, sound advice. I would recommend this to anyone.'

'Great advice, great people, thank you.'

'I found that all of the people involved with this service were very helpful and kind and made every effort they could to advise and support me.'

'I found the whole experience effective and professional, thank you.'

'Thanks very much for all your help. I feel much more able to resolve this issue.'

'Thank you for your very kind, sympathetic and informative help given on a charitable basis. I am most grateful and reassured.'

'It's a godsend this place.'

'Thank you very much for providing free legal service as it helps people better their lives.'

studentfeedback

'Working at NCLS has been the best opportunity that I have had as a student; not only do you get a chance for legal work experience but you really gain insight and motivation for what you are working towards. You get the chance to be treated like a professional, to be given responsibility and ultimately to really make a difference to people's lives.'

'My experience at NCLS has been essential for me in gaining vacation schemes and securing employment after University. The skills I have learnt through being the team leader of both the Admin and Domestic Abuse Team are practical which employers really like. The opportunities and connections I have made whilst volunteering have been so valuable for me when going into the workplace.'

Free Legal Advice Service

We currently run three free and independent Free Legal Advice (FLA) services thanks to the contribution of 64 experienced private solicitors and barristers who so generously give their time for free.

Norwich – a twice weekly drop in service is held at our office in St Clements House. On Tuesdays we have General and Family Law solicitors, and on Fridays General and Employment solicitors. UEA Law students attend the FLA sessions to observe and provide support where appropriate.

Cromer – every Tuesday evening an appointment service is held at Merchants Place and sessions cover Employment, Family, Wills and Probate and Elderly Client Care.

Great Yarmouth – every week by appointment services are held alternately at Great Yarmouth Citizens Advice and at Kingside Enterprise Hub. Sessions cover Family, Employment, Wills and Probate and Elderly Client Care.

Solicitor Firms Providing Norwich FLA 2016/17

Ashtons Legal
BBL Family Law
Birketts Solicitors
Broads Authority
Clapham & Collinge Solicitors
Cole Bentley & Co Solicitors
Cozens Hardy Solicitors LLP
Eversheds Sutherland
Family Law Consultancy
FM Family Law
Fosters Solicitors
GMS Law
Gordon Dean Solicitors LLP

Hatch Brenner Solicitors
Howard Pollok & Webb
Howes Percival
Leathes Prior Solicitors
Linked Law
MJP Solicitors
Scott-Moncrieff Associates
Spire Solicitors LLP
Steeles Law Solicitors
Story & Robison

Solicitors who have provided advice at Norwich sessions:

Sue Bailey
Tom Bailey
Peter Baughan
Adam Blenkinsop
Simon Bransby
Sian Carrel
Richard Clegg
Ginny Colman
Lindsey Crockett
Gordon Dean
Ben Dures
Francesca Easter
James Eden
Mark Foley

Graham Gall
Daniel Gallagher
Sarab Gosal
Sam Greenhalgh
David Harris
Sally Harris
Catherine Hepworth
Robert Hickford
Penelope Horne
Jane Liddle
Deborah Lloyd
Matthew Lord
Linda Marshall
David Milton

Caroline Mitchell
Jessica Piper
Maya Ribbands
Belinda Robison
Laura Savage
Andrew Spencer
Lucy Steele
Gareth Stevens
Robert Tiffen
Stephanie Walmsley
Sultan Walpole
Owen Warnock
Sara Westwood
Simon Willis

Solicitors Providing Cromer FLA 2016/2017

Working Law Solicitors
Clapham & Collinge Solicitors
Silver and Ward Solicitors
Hansells Solicitors
Butcher Andrews
Pope & Co

Sally Davenport
Neale Grearson, Lesley Ward
Clare Mayell
Neil Stubbs
Julia Buckingham, James Eden
Greg Pope

Solicitors Providing Great Yarmouth FLA 2016/17

Chamberlins
England & Co
Gordon Dean Solicitors llp
Norton Peskett
Scott Montcrieff Associates
Spire Solicitors

Malcolm Duffield
Christopher Porter
Gordon Dean
Tracey Jordan, Michelle Bean, David Rose
Ben Dures
David Harris, Richard Bevan

Achievements

A total of 1,745 client matters were advised through our FLA service in 2016/17 with 1,456 clients seen in Norwich, 179 in Cromer and 110 in Great Yarmouth. This is a 10% increase on last year. The FLA service which saw the biggest increase in demand was generalist advice, with numbers increasing by 19% on 2015/16; for this category Consumer issues, Wills and Probate, Housing and Debt were the main enquiries. There was an 8% increase in clients for Family Law and a 1% increase for Employment Law. The complexity of issues with which clients are presenting has continued to increase and it remains challenging to advise clients in the 15 minute time slots available. To enable clients to act on the advice provided and where we have student capacity we are assisting with the drafting of letters for clients. In April we made improvements to the Norwich reception area which has benefitted both clients and staff working in the open plan office area.

Employment FLA

The Norwich Employment Service is now well established and delivered by a team of UEA law students. The team carries out fact finding interviews prior to the client's appointment with the employment solicitor. Where appropriate, the students then provide further support, for example, drafting letters to employers for clients under supervision from the solicitor. This additional support ensures clients get the most out of their session with the solicitor and enables the volunteers to develop their skills and knowledge.

The service assisted 181 clients which is nearly 50% of all clients advised by the employment solicitors. We are continuing to develop this support for the Employment FLA service to assist more clients and are also exploring the possibility of developing an Employment Tribunal representation service.

Case Study

Peter was bullied at his place of work to an extent that he was too scared to go in. He chose to leave due to the bullying but the employer demanded that he repay the cost of an online course he had taken as part of his training, at a cost of approximately £1,000. When Peter said that he would not pay this, the employer threatened legal action and refused to provide him with a reference. Peter saw a solicitor at one of our FLA Employment sessions and was advised that the treatment he had received was unfair and a fundamental breach of his employment contract. We drafted

a letter for Peter to send to his employer stating this and pointing out that, should he be taken to court, he would provide evidence that the behaviour he was subjected to was unacceptable. Peter subsequently informed us that since the letter had been sent, his employer had dropped the matter which was a big relief to him.

This case demonstrates that early and timely advice can benefit clients both financially and emotionally and ensure the best outcome for the client.

solicitorfeedback

'NCLS provides much needed services to those who would otherwise be left with no other way of receiving legal advice. It is clearly a challenge for NCLS to sustain services in the light of increasing demand and so it is a pleasure to volunteer at NCLS and assist those seeking legal advice.'

We are delighted to report that due to the success of our volunteering scheme, former UEA law student volunteer Naomi Newell has returned as a qualified solicitor to join our Free Legal Advice rota. Naomi, a qualified Dispute Resolution Solicitor with Norwich firm Cozens Hardy Solicitors, volunteered with NCLS throughout her 4 years as a student at UEA.

Naomi said 'It is more important now than ever before that the legal profession does its bit for charities that provide much-needed free legal advice to the local community... It was a very proud moment for me to sign my NCLS application form to enter onto the rota as a qualified solicitor.' We hope that Naomi's application will be the first of many former student volunteers to return as successfully qualified solicitors.

Service Funding

In 2016/17 the FLA Cromer service received dedicated funding from Cromer Town Council and the Victory Housing Trust. All the FLA services were supported by grants from Broadland and South Norfolk Councils and Norwich Consolidated Charities towards our core costs as well as the funding we receive from our partnership agreement with UEA.

Future Aims & Objectives

We continue to encourage all firms across Norfolk to be represented on the rotas. However sustaining our current levels of service is challenging at a time where there is very little growth within private firms which limits their capacity to assist us. For clients who have cases with merit we have started

to make applications to the Bar Pro Bono Unit with the aim of securing barristers to represent clients who are not able to obtain legal aid and cannot afford to pay for advice and representation. We will also continue to seek the support of local Barristers' Chambers for our clients. We have recently started piloting the use of Skype to enable service delivery to clients who are unable to get to our office in Norwich or attend appointments at our outreach services. We will continue to develop the support we are able to offer to FLA clients through improved fact finding and assisting with light touch further work such as letters before action and using student volunteers to help with Small Claims applications via the student volunteer team. We are making improvements to our data collection to more accurately assess demand and identify how we might develop the service to try to meet this demand.

Thanks

We are grateful to all the FLA firms and individual solicitors listed above. There is not enough room here to include all the excellent feedback given but it is clear that clients are genuinely impressed and grateful for the service they receive. Our thanks also go to all the volunteers who ably run our very busy Norwich FLA reception service, Sophie McAllister, Tara McCarthy, Faye Milton, Chris Moore, Emma Newstead, Tamsin Roques, Penny Steward, Anna Stothers, Cara Walker, Lauren Wonfor and Mary Wood.

Thanks also to the Cromer NCLS volunteer receptionists, Phil Livesey, Helen Ranson and Andrew Wells. In Great Yarmouth thanks go to all the staff, Jenny Keenor and Mel Gooch, and volunteers Simon Parry, Michelle Braniff and Richard Brighton from the Kingside and Enterprise Hub and Citizens Advice for assisting with reception.

Our appreciation goes to the staff at Merchants Place in Cromer who continue to support our service and our partners at Great Yarmouth CAB, GYROS, DIAL, MAP and Herring House. Thanks also to the student employment volunteers and the employment solicitors who have supported the service development by supervising the students' work.

We are also grateful to the Norfolk & Norwich Law Society for their continued support in providing us and our student volunteers with opportunities for training and professional development.

Judi Lincoln
Advice & Volunteer Manager

Migrant Workers Service



Left: Des McKeating, Migrant Worker Advice Co-ordinator & Hana Suzuki, Migrant Worker Adviser and Administrative Officer

The main remit of the Migrant Worker Service is to provide immigration advice to European Economic Area (EEA) Nationals and to help with challenging incorrect welfare benefit refusals. The service aims to make it easier for European migrants to integrate into UK life. Migrants from Europe continue to make a positive contribution to the UK economy and society; however their experience of life in the UK is not always without difficulties. Since the Referendum on membership of the European Union, EEA migrants in the UK have faced a great deal of uncertainty and insecurity.

Immigration advice is regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) and it is an offence to provide such advice without being approved by the OISC. As OISC level 1 advisers, we provide advice on a range of issues including rights of residence for EEA Nationals and their family members, rights to work and which welfare benefits they are entitled to claim. This often requires a great deal of work to navigate the complex bureaucracy that governs an individual's exact entitlements. This varies for each client depending on their situation and that of their family and we often have to go back through several years' worth of information.

Achievements

We advised a total of 215 new clients in 2016/17, an increase of 8.6% from 2015/16.

There has been a steady increase in the demand for the Migrant Workers Service, most notably after the Referendum in June 2016 and the Government's announcement in March 2017 starting the process of the UK leaving the EU. The uncertain environment created by the Referendum has seen a certain amount of panic and increased circulation of rumours within our client base. Arising from this, we were contacted by a major food factory within Norfolk asking us to advise their workforce.

We continue to provide immigration advice to EEA Nationals throughout the County, including outreach sessions in Kings Lynn and Great Yarmouth, as well as regularly seeing clients in Norwich. Our close partnership working which has developed over a number of years with organisations such as Access in Kings Lynn (formerly KLARS) and Mid-Norfolk CAB has helped us to strengthen our service delivery. This has led to us being included as a partner in the Big Lottery funded Mid and South Norfolk Advice and Support Project which started in June 2016.

clientfeedback

"Thank you very so much for your time and all the help. Really appreciate your patience and hard work"

The majority of cases we have seen over the past year have related to nationality and permanent residence issues. This comes in the wake of recent changes to nationality requirements, making the applications more complex.

Future

The outcome of the EU Referendum and the enactment of Article 50 has caused an increase in clients seeking assistance and we anticipate this continuing. Due to the uncertainty of the outcome of the Brexit negotiations and the lack of information being supplied by the Home Office, it is difficult as advisers to reassure clients who fear for their future. Over the next year we will offer advice and help to EU Nationals as the new residence rules are introduced.

Casestudy (Names have been changed)

Mrs A is Spanish and had come to the UK and began working here. She wanted her non-European husband to join her once she became established in the UK. We helped her make an online application for a permit for her husband to join her in the UK as a family member. Her husband then attended the Visa Centre to provide fingerprints and photographs as part of the application. Following this Mrs A received an e-mail from the British Embassy stating that this process was not completed correctly because of an IT problem and asking her to reply to the e-mail to request a new appointment. When she replied to the e-mail she received an automatic response stating that the e-mail address was not operational and advising her to make contact via the Home Office website. We tried to contact the Home Office via their website on Mrs A's behalf – this resulted in us receiving an e-mail from the British Embassy similar to the one Mrs A received asking us to reply confirming that we wanted a new appointment for Mr A. We received the same response to our reply, that the e-mail address was not operational. At this point we wrote to the Home Office and complained about the application process. This resulted in Mr A being contacted and given an appointment to submit his fingerprints and photographs. He was subsequently issued with a family permit and travelled to the UK to join his wife. The online application for a family permit is not straightforward and the problems Mr and Mrs A encountered are not uncommon. This is a typical example of how our advice can help people navigate the often confusing and difficult processes involved in immigration applications. In this instance our help also minimised the length of time the family needed to live apart and the distress caused by this.



Debt Advice Service



The Debt Advice Service assists people in financial difficulty to gain control of their debt situation and to develop a plan to deal with their indebtedness. The service can help anyone in Norfolk but is particularly aimed at vulnerable people or those with complex needs, for example

- Offenders, ex-offenders or their families
- People with mental health problems
- People with learning disabilities
- Those with a disability or long-term illness



From the Top:

Carol Gormal, Debt Caseworker

Andy Cobb, Debt Adviser

Susan Craddock, Debt Caseworker

Funding is provided principally by the Money Advice Service (MAS) as part of the national Face-to-Face Debt Advice Project, channelled through Citizens Advice as the project co-ordinator. Our service also received additional funding support from Norwich Consolidated Charities, Norwich City Council and the Shaw Trust.

Service Developments

MAS funding for the project had been due to end on 31 March 2016, but was extended twice for six months at a time; it has now been extended again until 31 March 2018.

MAS sets targets for new clients seen, and this number rose significantly from 324 in the previous year to 407 in 2016/17, an increase of 25%. High demand for the service helped us to achieve this challenging target, in addition to follow-up work on an existing caseload of over 200 clients. MAS continue to encourage the giving of one off advice whereas the majority of our vulnerable clients require much more holistic support. We are only able to provide that level of support and at the same time achieve the MAS targets because the additional funding we receive from other sources as mentioned above enables us to employ additional staffing resources. 60% of our debt clients have been elsewhere for advice without having their debt problems resolved and in some cases they have been worsened e.g. when a private debt management company arranges an

inappropriate repayment programme without considering other options which would have been in the client's best interest.

We also commenced a pilot scheme in partnership with the Shaw Trust to provide a debt service to prisoners at HMP Bure and HMP Waveney. The service is delivered via e-mail, post and telephone, with a Case Manager at the Prison taking responsibility for obtaining the information that we need and supporting the client. So far feedback from the Case Managers and from clients using this service has been extremely positive.

Debt Trends

Debt continues to be one of the biggest enquiry areas for people seeking advice and partially due to the squeeze on household incomes personal indebtedness continues to grow. Total UK personal debt is now £1.529 trillion, having increased from £1.484 trillion one year ago, an increase of £45 billion. The Office for Budget Responsibility predicts that household debt will increase by another £793 billion within the next five years, a 52% increase.

With interest rates remaining at historic lows, servicing this debt ought to be less of a problem. However, the average credit card interest rate is now almost 18% higher than the base rate. Many clients have discovered that if they can only afford minimum payments they can never make meaningful inroads into their debt, especially if they continue to use it to prop up their income. Frighteningly, for a credit card bearing the average interest rate, a debt of £2,500 would take over 25 years to repay if only the minimum payment were made each month; this assumes the card is never used again.

Resolving credit card debt can be transformational for a client's financial situation and is relatively straightforward for the adviser. However there has been a noticeable increase in clients unable to afford even basic household bills such as rent, gas, electricity and Council

Tax. Accordingly almost 30% of the debt by value over the last year has been priority debt, compared to 20% three years ago.

This is particularly significant because generally funds have to be found to make offers to priority creditors and yet more and more people have no available income with which to do so. For both clients and advisers this is a difficult and stressful situation as there are few obvious solutions to a deficit budget once income has already been maximised. Clearing debt via an insolvency option such as a Debt Relief Order (DRO) or Bankruptcy will only provide a partial solution if the underlying problem is insufficient income.

There is an increasing disparity between those who own their own home and those who do not. 63% of households in the UK are either owned outright or with a mortgage, and, on average, mortgagors pay 18% of their income toward this cost. However, private renters typically pay 41% of their income in rent. 92.6% of our clients are tenants or are homeless.

For the future we anticipate that the number of people seeking debt advice will continue to grow. Unfortunately we can also expect that the numbers of people with intractable problems will increase, as the tools available to the debt adviser have remained the same whilst the nature of client problems has changed. For example, a financial statement is quickly obsolete for someone whose income is unstable, in receipt of Universal Credit, or on a zero hours contract. Hopefully the advice sector and the credit industry will be able to develop creative and enduring solutions to such problems and needs.

clientfeedback

'I can't express enough how much I appreciate your help'

Service Developments

We will continue to try to identify where there is the greatest need for debt advice and to try develop our services to meet that need. We would like if possible to extend the model of advice for offenders we have developed for the Shaw Trust to other prisons e.g. Norwich Prison where previous initiatives have been far less successful in terms of achieving good outcomes for clients. We also wish to extend the use of advice provision via Skype where appropriate to both save the client having to travel to our Norwich office and to save the Debt Advisers' time in traveling across the County.

Thanks go to Debt Advisers Susan Craddock and Carol Gormal as well as to volunteers Alex Christian, Olivia Whitehorn and Lauren Wonfor and for all their support.

Andy Cobb
Debt Adviser

Casestudy (Names have been changed)

Phillip was referred to us from the Shaw Trust, he was in prison and not expecting to be released until mid-2019. He had consulted an adviser within the prison a year ago but wasn't impressed as they suggested leaving his debts until his release. However his creditors were continuing to write to his mother's address and to worry her considerably; in addition he felt that upon release he would prefer not to be immediately overwhelmed by payment demands.

Phillip had numerous debts complicated by the fact that most had been passed from one collection agency to another. Unhelpfully some collectors add their own unique reference number and delete the original when they take on a debt; this makes it harder to establish an accurate picture of exactly what is owed. Accordingly although the client thought he owed almost £25,000, the final total was verified as just over £17,000.

Despite Phillip having been in prison for six months the creditors seemed intent on continuing their collection activities. One was continuing to threaten an Attachment of Earnings order for an unpaid judgement. Another stated, for a debt of £6,000, 'We are unable to hold the account until he is released from prison, but we are willing to consider a suitable monthly payment plan from his prison wages'.

Given that Phillip had no assets or savings, and his prison earnings were negligible, he was delighted that we could offer a DRO as an option. This was subsequently approved, and will ensure that he has a fresh start with no debt by the time he is released from prison.

Obtaining a DRO is normally a lengthy process because the creditor and client details must be 100% accurate, including account numbers and balances. If any details are incorrect or any debts are omitted they cannot be added later; furthermore, the application could be rejected by the Insolvency Service. If this happens it is nevertheless counted as an application which means that the client cannot apply again for another six years.

We therefore take considerable care to ensure that an application is absolutely correct before submitting it because of the implications of making an error.

Feedback from a Case Manager at the Prison stated: *'The man wishes me to convey his gratitude for your help. He tells me that he feels so much better in himself. Many thanks for all your help, I appreciate it.'*

Welfare Benefits Service



Left: Sue Kileen, volunteer, Charlie Sayer, Welfare Rights Manager & Rob Ireland, Welfare Benefits Adviser

Our Welfare Benefits Service has had another busy and successful year assisting clients with submission of appeals and representation at Social Security Benefit Tribunals.

Referrals to the Welfare Benefits Service continue to be taken from partner agencies via the NCAN Common Referral System, or if needed, informally from agencies not using the system. We also take self-referrals from clients resident in the Norwich City local authority area if they were unable to obtain preliminary advice from a referring agency.

The innovative partnership between NCLS and the University of East Anglia Law School continues to be utilised to great effect by the Welfare Benefits Service. We have a team of volunteer law students who undergo training each year and then work under supervision to assist clients with appeals and Tribunal representation and to provide administrative support to the service. In addition, we also have a small team of community volunteers and one Open University law student.

The contribution from the students and community volunteers allows NCLS to assist a far greater number of clients than we could do otherwise and the students in turn gain invaluable client care and advocacy experience.

Achievements

Our client numbers have risen again this year to 305, up from 257 in 2015/16, an increase of 19%. During the first two quarters of the year, we saw 63 and 62 new clients respectively, rising to 85 and 95 in the second two quarters.

We represented at 225 Tribunals during 2016/17, up from 170 in 2015/16 and only 90 in 2014/15. Interestingly in 2013/14, the first full year of the service, we represented at 164 Tribunals.

Previously, there were concerns that claimants were not exercising their right of appeal following the introduction of the Mandatory Reconsideration process in October 2013. This was thought to be the main cause of a decrease in appeals in 2014/2015. The effect of the Mandatory Reconsideration process appears now to have been alleviated following the significant increase in appeals.

The increase in appeal numbers is also attributable to the number of negative decisions made by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) which has been widely reported in the press.

Of the clients who we did not represent at Tribunal, a number secured successful outcomes prior to the Tribunal stage, and a minority did not pursue their appeals having accepted our advice with regards to the lack of legal merit of their case or the suggestion that they should be pursuing alternative benefits.

Total number of Tribunal hearings listed (Apr 2016-Mar 2017)	225
Withdrawn/ceased to act	24
Total number of hearings attended	201
Adjourned/postponed and relisted	46
Allowed/lapsed in favour	129
Dismissed	26
Percentage of appeals allowed	83.2%

National Tribunal Trends

The Ministry of Justice Tribunals Statistics, which are reported quarterly, showed an increase in appeal receipts for all quarters of 2016/17 compared with the same quarters in 2015/16. There was a 21% increase in the quarter April to June compared with the same quarter of 2015, an increase of 47% from July to September, a 47% increase between October and December and an increase of 67% for the period January to March 2017. The increase in appeal receipts is mainly driven by an increase in Employment and Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payment appeals.

The statistics show that in each quarter a considerable number of decisions were overturned at Tribunal to be more favourable to the claimant. For example, in the quarter July to September 2016, 60% of appealed decisions cleared at hearing were revised in the claimant's favour, up from 55% in the same quarter in 2015. The increase in more favourable decisions was also evidence in the first quarter of 2017 with 64% of appealed decisions being revised in favour of the claimant, up from 56% in the same period in 2016. This does support the suggestion that the DWP are making less favourable decisions for claimants.

Future

The Social Security and Child Support Tribunal has reported that it has seen an increase of 81% of appeal receipts nationally compared to 2016. At the end of June 2017, the Social Security and Child Support Tribunal reports that there are 103,758 cases outstanding (up 86% compared to June 2016).

Income generation

Our recorded income generation for 2016/ 2017 was £1,166,123 with the total income generation figure for the service from its inception at the end of 2012 being £2,846,175. In practice this underplays the figures as we record income generation for one year forwards from the date of Tribunal and in practice many Appellants are given two or three year awards which would give a far greater figure.

clientfeedback

'I am really happy with the service I received. My Appeal would have been lost without the support and advice I received from Rob and the Team at NCLS. A big thank you to everyone'

'I have always received the best help at all times. Thank you'

'NCLS's support has been never ending, 100% and (the adviser's) confidence in the case has been great comfort to us'

Ministry of Justice Consultation: Transforming our Justice System

In September 2016, the Ministry of Justice launched a consultation titled 'Transforming our Justice System'. The consultation made several proposals, in particular focusing on the digitisation of Courts and Tribunals and reforms to Tribunal panel composition.

The consultation proposed that the Social Security and Child Support Tribunals would be one of the first services to become digitised. The consultation also proposed that a presumption would be created that Tribunal panels would only consist of one panel member, the legal panel member, creating the risk that specialist expertise would be removed from Tribunals.

NCLS submitted a response to the 'assisted digital' and 'panel composition' parts of the consultation stressing the vital importance of oral hearings in terms of access to justice and fair hearings for our often vulnerable client group, and supporting the retention of medical panel members for ESA, and medical and disability panel members for PIP appeal Tribunals.

The Government published their response to the consultation in February which confirmed that it is not intending to proceed with the proposal to introduce single member panels as the default position in Tribunals. However it is still intending to pursue the digitisation of Tribunals and to provide assisted digital facilities for Court and Tribunal Service users. NCLS

will continue to monitor developments, and to ensure that we adapt our service to best meet client need as the system develops.

Worryingly, a recent Freedom of Information request has revealed that the DWP's key performance measures include a target of upholding 80% of their original decisions (decisions that have either been unfavourable to the claimant or the previous decision has been maintained) at the Mandatory Reconsideration stage, a target that they exceeded in 2016/17, upholding 87.5% of decisions. That statistic alone we feel confirms the very vital role of a right of appeal to an independent Tribunal.

Thanks

Our thanks go to all the staff, students and volunteers who have been involved in delivering the service this year. We would also like to thank Norwich City Council, Norwich Consolidated Charities, the A B Charitable Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation and the Geoffrey Watling Trust for their contributions to the funding of this service.

studentfeedback

'Thank you for giving me the opportunity to build my confidence and believe that I can pursue a career in law. I been lucky enough to learn so much more than I could ever have imagined. I truly hope I will be back to give in the future to give back to you everything you have done for me.'
Holly Postle – UEA joint Team Leader

Casestudy

(Names have been changed)

Sandra had suffered a stroke in 2013 that had left her with weakness down the left side of her body.

The DWP made a decision in December 2015 that Sandra was only entitled to Personnel Independence Payments (PIP) with the standard rate of the mobility component. Previously she had been entitled to the standard rate of both the daily living and mobility components.

Sandra's award of the standard rate of the daily living component was removed following a medical examination that was conducted on the papers alone. No physical examination was undertaken. Whilst the DWP are legally entitled to make a judgement based on written evidence alone, it makes it more difficult for them to justify

removing an existing award.

The appeal first went before Tribunal in April 2016. This hearing was adjourned for the Tribunal Service to obtain Sandra's medical records to assist the Tribunal with better understanding her condition. Sandra was also warned that her current award of the standard rate of the mobility component may be at risk of being removed by the Tribunal.

The appeal was then placed before the Tribunal on a further two occasions where the DWP were directed to conduct a face to face medical examination of Sandra.

The medical examination was completed in November 2016. The resulting Health Care Professional's report was not submitted to HMCTS or circulated to all parties, despite directions from the Tribunal that the DWP were to do this.

The appeal was listed before the District Tribunal

Judge. The hearing was attended by a presenting officer from the DWP who produced the Health Care Professional's report, confirming a standard rate award of the daily living component. This point was conceded by the presenting officer and the Tribunal made the award of the standard rate of the daily living component and confirmed the standard rate mobility component award.

Had the DWP produced the Health Care Professional's report earlier, this appeal could have been resolved at an earlier date. The DWP had repeatedly ignored the directions of the Tribunal in not producing the Health Care Professional's report. We had also requested a copy of the report but this had not been provided.

Charlie Sayer
Welfare Rights Manager



Discrimination Advice Service



From the Top:

Beccy Branson, Administrative Officer

Julie Bennett, Administrative & Finance Officer

Joanne Freeman, Administrative Officer

Service Profile

This service has been developed in partnership with Ipswich and Suffolk Council for Racial Equality (ISCRE) who we pay to deliver the advice on our behalf. We offer a free and independent monthly by appointment session at our offices.

Audrey Ludwig and Jonathan Parratt, solicitors from ISCRE, are supported by UEA law students who provide administrative support, follow-up and development work.

Achievements

We assisted 11 clients over the year and each had an in-depth interview. The cases involved racial, age, sexual, religious and disability discrimination issues. The take up of the service continues to be disappointing – although there is a lot of anecdotal evidence of need, it remains difficult to identify cases of discrimination or to encourage people who are experiencing discrimination to take action.

Funding and Future Development

The Discrimination Service is part funded by Norwich Consolidated Charities and by the Eastern Legal Support Trust, the latter having also provided funding to undertake research into need in order to help us to secure future funding.

As at the beginning of June 2016 ISCRE were still waiting to hear the outcome of their application to the Lottery for renewed funding and had to temporarily suspend their service in Norwich but we were delighted that the service was restored from January 2017.

We continue to consider how we can raise awareness and have improved opportunities for Employment law clients to be referred on to this Service.

Thanks

NCLS is very grateful to Audrey Ludwig and Jonathan Parratt for having continued to provide this service and for their commitment to helping us to develop it on a more sustainable basis. Unfortunately at the time of writing, Jonathan has got another job and, although not leaving ISCRE completely, will no longer be available to deliver our service. ISCRE are currently recruiting a replacement who will be able to resume advising clients in Norwich.

Judi Lincoln
Advice & Volunteer Manager

Domestic Abuse Service

case study

(Names have been changed)

Alison has 3 children and had separated from her partner. David, the perpetrator, is the father to two of the children. He had been arrested for a criminal offence and was not allowed to see Alison. She was reluctant to see David convicted. Children's Services were concerned about the fragility of Alison's health and concerned about the children's welfare as there had been problems at school. The solicitor was able to give holistic advice to Alison about looking after her health, housing issues and information about occupation orders, other agencies she should liaise with and how to comply with Children's Services' requirements. Advice was given about civil remedies including non-molestation orders and the need to try to get legal aid. Alison was provided with a detailed letter about the options open to her. This is also a useful document for her to show other agencies the point she has reached in terms of her civil legal options and remedies.

This case demonstrates the complexity of clients' issues and the benefits of holistic advice together with a written follow-up. It also shows how challenging it can be for clients when the criminal justice system is involved but the client is seeking remedies from the civil justice system.

student feedback

'Helping real people with real issues is experience you cannot gain from University but is exactly what I have gained at NCLS. As one of the DA team volunteers I have been able to witness how some areas of the legal system operate in practice and the reality of the legal aid cuts and how they can affect the most vulnerable.'

Service Profile

NCLS provides a weekly domestic abuse advice service at our Norwich offices. The service not only gives the client advice on their legal position but an officer from Norwich City Council is available by telephone to advise on future housing options. We also have a direct line to Norfolk Constabulary's Safeguarding Team to liaise about any action the Police are taking.

The legal advice is provided by a rota of experienced solicitors who so generously give their time for free and our thanks go to them.

- Helen Barnes – Fosters Solicitors
- Francesca Easter – Ashtons Legal
- Joanna Longe - Longe & Co
- Amanda Maruca - Spire Solicitors
- Caroline Mitchell - Clapham & Collinge
- Belinda Robison - Story & Robison
- Kerry Rowell – Rogers and Norton

The service is supported by UEA Law Students who provide administrative support, follow up and development work and our thanks go to Jess Bailey, Stacey Ashworth, Patrycja Zelezniak and Dani Lewis. The students also attended a number of events, ran a stall advertising our service at UEA during Say No to Domestic Violence Week and get the opportunity to attend domestic violence trials at the Courts with Leeway advocates and to shadow housing advisers at Norwich City Council.

Thanks also to Ginny Colman from Birketts Solicitors who supervises the service and to Peta Waters and Jenny Ford, City Council Housing Advisors, for their continued support.

client feedback

'It was really good to have a Skype appointment. I have a heart condition and I find it hard to get into Norwich and get around. I got advice about how to divorce my husband who was very violent to me.'

Achievements

We assisted 90 clients over the year. Each client has an in-depth interview and is offered a written follow-up, with advice about safeguarding the information. We also provide clients with information around staying safe e.g. ensuring abusers cannot track them via their mobile phones. Clients are often completely unaware of their rights and lack an understanding about the criminality of abuse. Despite the high volume of cases going through the criminal justice system, many women and

men experiencing domestic abuse are too frightened to report the abuse because the perpetrator has threatened them, or they are fearful about what will happen to their children, or simply because they feel stigmatised and ashamed. Demand for the service is high but due to the nature of the clients' circumstances, 30% of appointments were cancelled or clients did not attend, despite improved procedures encouraging them to do so.

We recently expanded the service to provide advice via Skype to clients at Mid Norfolk CAB in Dereham and hope to extend this initiative to other areas.

We are members of the county-wide Community Safety Partnership and the Domestic Abuse Change Programme and I am the NCLS Domestic Abuse Champion. I attend Norfolk & Suffolk Criminal Justice Board meetings around victims of domestic abuse. There is increasing concern about abusers using the Court process to continue the abuse – see the Family Court Support Service report. We also attend events run by the Norfolk Family Justice Board and Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board.

Service Funding

The service currently receives funding from Norwich Consolidated Charities and the Norwich Businesswomen's Network and is also supported by grants from local authorities towards our core costs.

Aims & Objectives

We had moved from a fortnightly to weekly frequency to try to meet the increase demand but the pool of available solicitors is quite small. The situation is exacerbated by the diminishing pool of solicitors firms doing legal aid in Norfolk – a 33% fall in the number of providers between April 2013 and November 2016. So even if a client is entitled to legal aid, there may not be a solicitor available to provide it. We are working with Leeway and the local Law Society to find ways of addressing this problem.

Solicitor Belinda Robison said - *'NCLS provides an excellent service in a very difficult climate. They are trying to fill a gap in the context of cuts to Legal Aid and where accessing Legal Aid is increasingly challenging in Norfolk. Without solicitors being willing to volunteer this service could not be sustained.'*

Judi Lincoln
Advice & Volunteer Manager

Family Court Support Service



Above: Hannah Hill, Family Court Support Coordinator

Norwich Court feedback

...the Family Panel welcomes the initiative of the (NCLS) Family Court Support Service which provides assistance to those who are unsure how to prepare and fully participate in the Court hearing. Many of those who find themselves in this position have been the subject of domestic violence; therefore, to have the assistance of someone who can help identify the paramount issues for their child, assist in the preparation of the paperwork, provide guidance to focus on the relevant issues for the Court and then quietly support them through the hearing is invaluable and can make a real difference both to the individuals and the court process.

client feedback

'You stand for the vulnerable, oppressed and unheard. You deserve great recognition.... I am sure hundreds of people in my position will benefit from your help. Thank you so much.'

Service Profile

The Family Court Support Service (FCSS) is now in its fourth year of assisting clients seeking help when they have a dispute over contact with their children (Private Law Child Contact Arrangements).

Achievements

During 2016/17 we assisted 125 clients, compared to 21 in 2015/16 when we were still piloting the service. We have been able to develop the service through recruiting nine volunteer Family Court Supporters who help clients to complete Court forms, attend hearings with them and help to draft complex statements which are then reviewed by one of our FLA family solicitors. Clients can also get advice from our Domestic Abuse Service. Our volunteers cannot represent clients in Court but provide valuable practical support during the often stressful experience of appearing as a Litigant in Person (LIP).

The funding we received from the Access to Justice Foundation and the Resolute Community Fund enabled us to recruit a part time Co-ordinator, Hannah Hill, to manage and support the volunteers and co-ordinate the service. Hannah is currently on maternity leave and former volunteer Tamsin Roques has been appointed on a temporary basis to provide maternity cover.

Ideally we see clients in advance of their Court hearings but we also provide a Family Court Support Desk service to help those who attend Court without representation. During the year we attended 135 Court hearings, provided advice at 61 office interviews and ran 54 Court Desks. We meet regularly with Court staff to review progress and agree improvements to the service. We work with the Court to provide video links and screens to protect clients who do not wish to face their former, often allegedly abusive, partners, and identify when separate waiting areas are required.

NCLS is a member of the national LIP Support Strategy Network and we regularly attend Norfolk Family Justice Board events. We were invited to the Family Justice Council to contribute to the LIP Support Strategy. In 2016, neither the applicant nor the respondent had legal representation in 33% of private law cases nationally.

Funding

In addition to funding, the Access to Justice Foundation have also offered support around training volunteers, trying to persuade HMCTS to advise clients to seek advice from us when issuing Court hearing dates, securing additional funding, etc.

We are exploring the extension of the service to Great Yarmouth to meet identified demand.

We had two cases accepted by the Bar Pro Bono Unit (BPBU) on their merit but no one was available to represent the clients. We are working with the BPBU to see how we can address this. We are improving the information we give to clients e.g. details of contact centres, drug and alcohol testing. We will also continue to develop our volunteer team.

Thanks

Thanks go to volunteers Caroline Ball, Jane Bevan, Rachel Bradshaw, Sara Burcham, Beverly Easter, Deryn Hall, Sue Hatherley, Tamsin Roques, Cara Walker, Mary Wood, supervising solicitor Francesca Easter and student Katherine Newson for her administrative support. We are also grateful for the support of Norwich Combined Court and in particular the Legal Team Manager Sheryl Kinnear.

Judi Lincoln
Advice & Volunteer Manager

Case study

(Names have been changed)

Carl and Nicola were at Court over a dispute about how much time their children should spend with each parent. The Family Court Supporter was able to act as 'messenger' for Carl in dealing with Nicola who had a solicitor. She was also able to emphasise that the hearing was not about past enmities but about the child's well-being.

By liaising with Nicola and her solicitor before the hearing, it became clear that the solicitor was going to raise concerns about Carl's mental health which gave Carl an opportunity to prepare a response to the Court. During the hearing, we supported Carl by calming him when comments were made about him and to prompt him to make the points he felt important. Carl is diagnosed with depression, anxiety and ADHD and he found the support really useful.

Nicola's solicitor drafted the Order for the Court and the Court Supporter asked the solicitor to go through it with Carl so that he was clear about the meaning. Following the hearing, the Court Supporter helped Carl who has dyslexia, to draft his statement for the next hearing and we had the statement checked by one of our FLA solicitors.



Above: Sarah Clack, Operations Manager

Housing Mediation Service

Housing Mediation Service

NCLS runs a twice monthly mediation service at the County Court in partnership with Norwich City Council and HM Courts Service. We assist City Council tenants who are in rent arrears by giving advice at an in-depth interview with the aim of preventing them from being brought before the Court in formal possession proceedings. This saves them the distress and anxiety of a Court hearing, where the Court can order possession, as well as a significant court fee.

We advise the tenants and mediate on their behalf with the Council to try to agree a suitable repayment arrangement. We are grateful to UEA law students Roshni Pandya, James Pettit, Alice Cropper and Katie Gordon who provided administrative and support work over the last year.

Achievements

In 2016/17 we saw 86 clients, up from 70 the previous year. In over 68% of cases the Council needed to take no further action as the repayment arrangements were adhered to so the service assists the prevention of homelessness.

The loss of Housing Benefit for one or more bedrooms because of the so-called 'Bedroom Tax' continues to cause arrears for many tenants referred to the service. We referred 25 clients to the NCLS Debt Service so they had the benefit of further streamlined support.

Andy Bays, the City Council's Housing Income Manager, said *'As in previous years this service continues to provide a vital resource for Norwich Council tenants with two-thirds of those who use the service going on to avoid possession action due to arrears. With the challenges facing low income households in the wake of the Government's welfare reforms we look forward to continuing this valuable partnership with NCLS in the future'*.

studentfeedback

'At NCLS, I learned many invaluable skills which will serve me well in the workplace. I learnt how to work effectively as part of a team, how to interview clients in a manner which was sensitive and effective and how to write formal letters to clients. It also gave me a fantastic insight into what a career in the law would be like, so volunteering with NCLS was a beneficial experience.'

The students supporting this service also attended Housing Possession hearings at the Court and had placements with the Council's Income Team and Housing Advice drop in service.

Service Funding

We are grateful for the funding we receive from the City Council towards the cost of this service.

Aims & Objectives

We anticipate more challenges for the service as further changes to welfare benefits are rolled out. We are already finding that clients subject to the Benefit Cap are struggling and have no alternative ways to make up losses which sometimes amount to £90 per week. The introduction of Universal Credit is likely to lead to further debt and money management problems for clients.

Our main aim for the coming year is to continue to deliver an in-depth service and do more follow-up work with clients including, wherever appropriate, referring them to our Free Legal Advice, Debt and Welfare Benefit Services.

Judi Lincoln
Advice & Volunteer Manager

clientfeedback

'Very very good service provided'

'The service was brilliant thanks a lot'

Casestudy

(Names have been changed)

Ann is a single parent with 5 children living in a City Council three bedroom property. Her income of around £370 a week consists of Income Support, Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit. Ann was previously in receipt of Housing Benefit of £71.73 a week but this stopped in November 2016 due to the introduction of the Benefit Cap which had led to an increase in her arrears from £63 to £1,167.

Ann had applied for Child Maintenance from her ex-partner through the Child Support Agency (CSA) but so far he has failed to make the payments due. The CSA are arranging for deductions to be taken directly from his wages but the client does not know when she will start to receive any payments.

She had been trying to make payments towards her rent when she could but was unable to make these regularly. Over the past year she had also paid off a debt of nearly £2,000 on a former property which she was left with when she separated from her partner. The debt had accrued as she had believed her ex-partner was paying the rent but he had not been doing so.

Ann was aware that she was at risk of losing her home but her youngest child is 1 years old and so it was virtually impossible for her to find work she could fit around child care and had no other way of increasing her income, her only other option being to try to reduce her spending.

We spoke to the Council who accepted a payment arrangement of rent plus £3.70 a week towards the arrears. However due to the high amount of arrears involved, they asked that she increase payment of her arrears as soon as she started to receive child maintenance.



Norfolk Community Advice Network



Above: Janka Rodziewicz, NCAN Strategy Manager

Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN) comprises over 50 Social Welfare Advice agencies, together with local authority representatives and private solicitors, led by a Steering Group comprising NCLS as lead agency, Norfolk, Mid-Norfolk and Diss and Thetford Citizens Advice, Age UK Norfolk and Age UK Norwich, Shelter, Mancroft Advice Project and Equal Lives.

The aim of NCAN is to ensure that Norfolk residents can access good quality, social welfare information, advice and representation at a time or place when they need it most through improving the client journey, ensuring best practice, supporting the sector to be collaborative and cost effective and to have a voice at strategic level

Context

These are particularly challenging and changing times for the social welfare advice sector because of a number of factors including the following -

- We have seen the **further roll out of Welfare Reform** with Great Yarmouth being one of the first areas in the country to be subject to the full digital Universal Credit service, resulting in worrying increases in the level of evictions as the housing element is not paid direct to landlords, as well as delays in benefit payments.
- We have continued to feel the impact of the **legal aid cuts** introduced in April 2013 which has increased the demand for free legal advice, particularly for family cases, and the numbers of people who are unable to secure representation in Court. Even though in theory legal aid is still available in some cases of domestic abuse, there is a reduction in the number of law firms undertaking legal aid contracts, preventing eligible clients from accessing justice.
- Cuts in public expenditure have **reduced the funding available** for the advice sector. However, both the health and social care sectors are now looking to improve the signposting and referral of people to advice services, as their own resources are increasingly under pressure. The positive impact on health of social welfare advice is being increasingly recognised, as is the significant portion of time GPs spend supporting people with such issues (according to the Low Commission 2015 report on The Role of Advice Services in Health Outcomes GPs spend 15% of their time on benefit issues). Whilst these developments are welcome, there is an increasingly worrying trend to provide funding for 'connectors' to signpost into advice services, but not funding those advice services themselves.
- **Cuts in public expenditure**, particularly welfare benefit cuts, have also resulted in increasing poverty, unemployment and inequality which have increased the demand for social welfare advice.
- The **increasing pressure to reduce costs**, particularly for Government services, by increasing digital provision is causing problems for those more vulnerable clients who either do not have access to the Internet or struggle to navigate online processes. This is increasing the pressure on those social welfare services that continue to offer face-to-face advice.

NCAN's Activity

Over the past year NCAN has been responding to these pressures in a variety of ways as detailed below in order to support the social welfare advice sector to be more sustainable and to adopt a more strategic approach.

- **Campaigning for ongoing funding of advice** through collective NCAN responses to consultations, speaking out at meetings of various Boards, local Forums, etc. We have also challenged reductions in welfare provision, such as to the Disability Living Allowance in Norfolk.
- **Developing connections with the Health Sector** e.g. through attending Sustainable Transformation Plan meetings, the Health and Wellbeing Board, Clinical Commissioning Groups and building links with Integrated Care Co-ordinators. We have been involved in developing Social Prescribing initiatives in Norfolk which aim to enable frontline healthcare professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services. NCAN has been advocating for an advice-based approach to Social Prescribing to help people with their advice needs at the earliest possible stage, thereby reducing hassle for patients and maximising available resources.
- **Progressing NCAN's No Wrong Door approach** in order to improve the client journey e.g. by developing the NCAN Directory and Referral System to ensure clients are able to reach the correct point of advice with minimum need to repeat their story.
- **Increasing our support for partner agencies interested in measuring outcomes** and demonstrating the beneficial health impacts of advice
- **Endeavouring to improve public sector understanding of advice services and their role in the prevention agenda** e.g. understanding of the nature of triage, the role of an advisor, the importance of quality and the key role of timely advice in helping to avoid debt, homelessness, stress and mental health issues. We have engaged with projects such as Social Services Community Clinics and Early Help Hubs. We have been working with local authorities to develop new models of advice provision.
- **Challenging Welfare Reform:** NCAN has been working with the DWP and local authorities to develop an advice sector strategy to respond to the full roll out of Universal Credit. We have also been feeding back to DWP and other stakeholders on the impact of welfare reform in Norfolk. We have organised collective

responses to consultations and Government reports e.g. National Audit Office consultation on Benefit Sanctions. We have worked with Equal Lives to organise a Personal Independence Payments (PIP) stakeholder event, providing local advice providers the opportunity to meet with representatives from DWP, Atos Health care and Capita. We also organised leaflet distribution and a talk at a Cinema City showing of I, Daniel Blake, highlighting the important work of the advice sector in supporting people to access benefits they are entitled to.

Future Funding

Since the 5 year Big Lottery funding for NCAN came to an end in 2015 we have been trying to secure alternative, sustainable funding from a range of sources, including grant applications to both national and local charities. We have also been widening the use of the NCAN referral system by statutory authorities for which we make a charge in order to subsidise NCAN's costs.

We encourage all partner agencies when making funding bids to include provision for NCAN support, particularly for use of the Directory and Referral System and support for outcome measurements.

Staff and Volunteers

We were sorry to lose Francesca Uragallo, NCAN Co-ordinator, to a new job this year, but would like to thank her for all her hard work. We were pleased to welcome Hannah Hill as the replacement Coordinator.

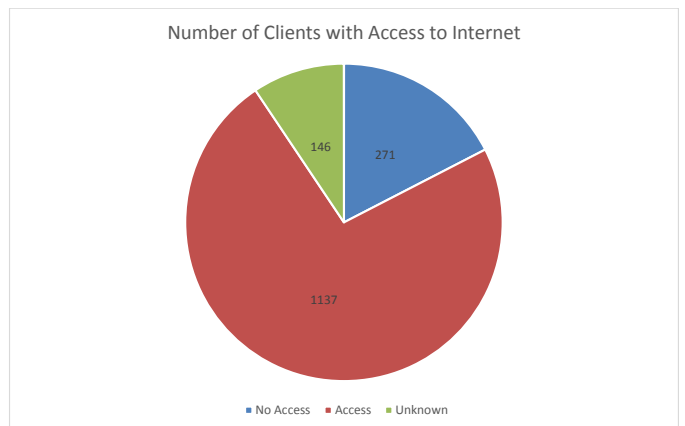
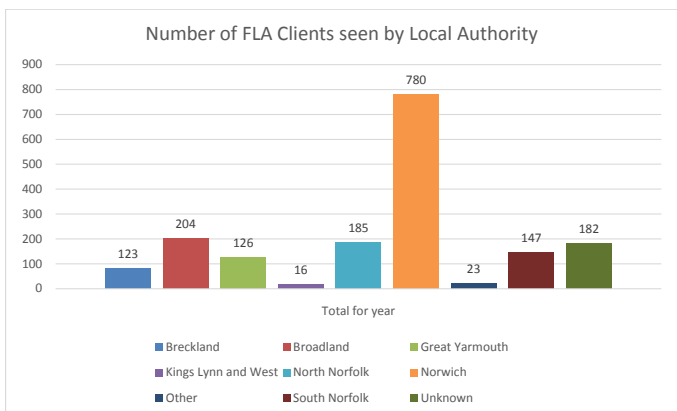
Thanks go to all the Volunteers who have worked with us this year namely Jacob Lawrence, Sophie Parkinson, Jennifer Mgbobukwa, and Emma Kiczma-Walsh, with special thanks to our longest standing volunteers Sive Poto and Emily Frost who have significantly developed our outcomes measurement activity.

Janka Rodziewicz
NCAN Strategy Manager

Free Legal Advice Service Statistics

The charts on this page show the number of Free Legal Advice client interviews carried out in each of the last 7 financial years.

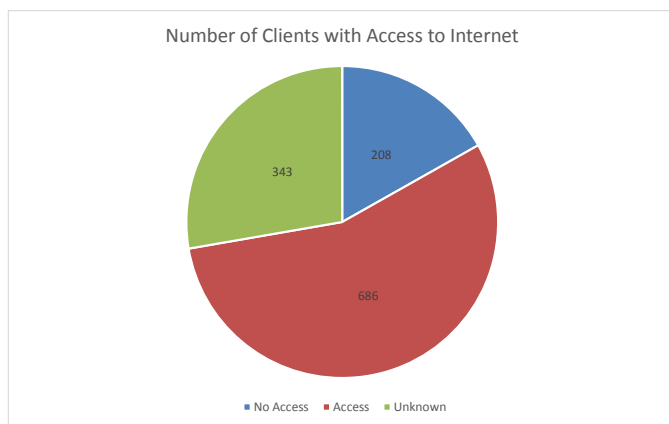
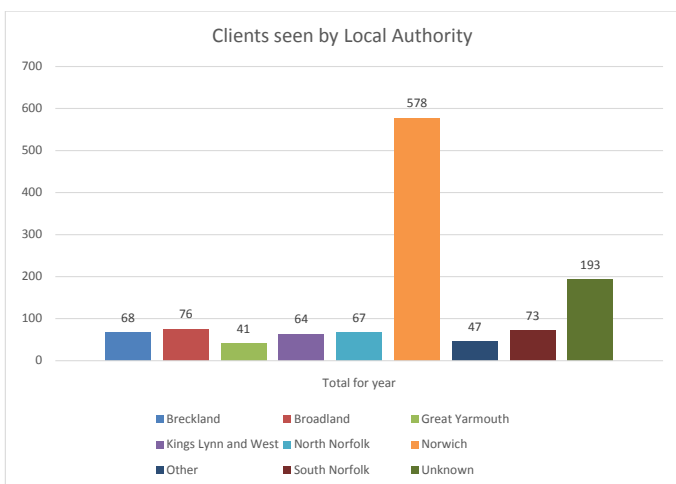
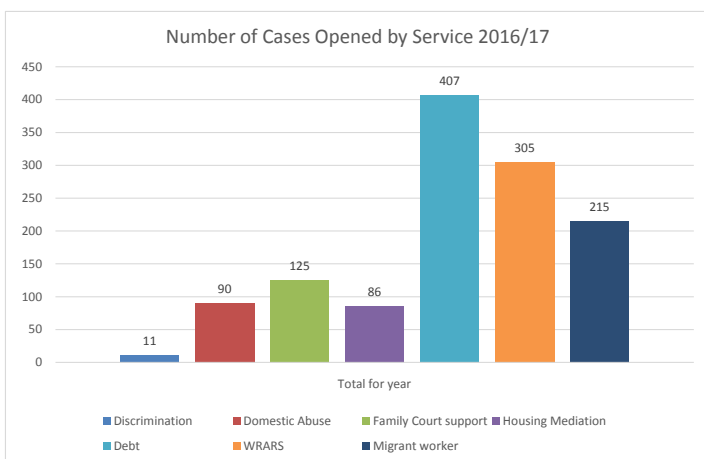
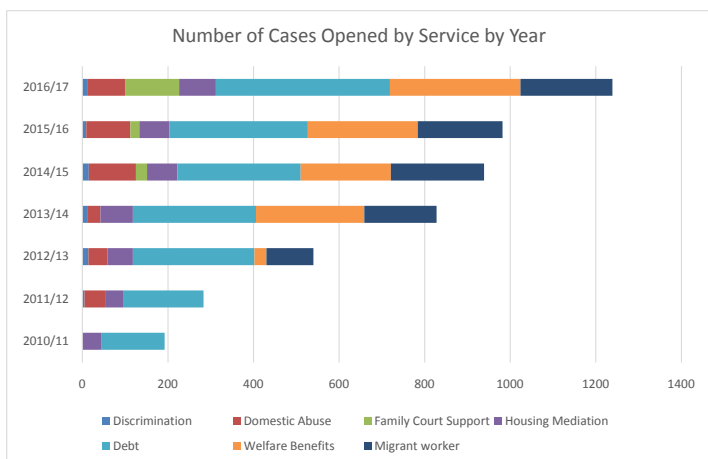
They also show a breakdown of the client interviews in 2016/17 by area of law, the number of clients seen by local authority and those who have access to the internet



Other Services Statistics

The charts on this page show the number of cases opened by our Non-FLA services in each of the last 7 financial years.

They also show a breakdown of cases by service in 2016/17, a breakdown of the number of the clients across all these services by local authority and those who have access to the internet





Above: Vanessa Morton
Chair Supporters Group.

Supporters of NCLS

The Supporters' Group, established in 2010, act as "friends" of NCLS, aiming to promote the work of the organisation as well as to raise funds to help continue and expand its services.

In May 2016 we celebrated 35 years of providing legal advice services to people in Norfolk with a special event at Earlham Hall, home of the charity's major partners, UEA Law School, and a follow-up tea at our offices during the summer. Liz Edwards, a founder member as well as a current Director, wrote a short history of NCLS to commemorate the occasion. Copies of the booklet - covering all the major landmarks and contributors to our development - are available free from the NCLS office.

Most prestigious of our fund-raising events is our annual public lectures which focus on key issues concerning social justice, contribute to information and debate, and raise the profile of our charity. In October we were delighted to join with Leeway Domestic Violence and Abuse Services to welcome Vera Baird QC, Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria, who spoke on the subject of 'Violence and Abuse against Women and Girls: Ensuring Accountability within the Police and Judiciary.' Vera Baird's talk on initiatives taken in Northumbria was constructive and thought-provoking and has helped to progress discussions about improving arrangements further here in Norfolk.

As usual, we held our highly popular quiz at the Unthank Arms in November. We also contributed a team to the Norwich Legal Walk organised by the Eastern Legal Support Trust. Staff raised money for NCLS through their Great Legal Bake and very successful Scavenger Hunt and fielded a team for the Law Society's Countdown, while volunteer Chris Moore ran the London Marathon in aid of NCLS. We also made a collection and gave information about our Welfare Rights Service at a showing of I, Daniel Blake at Cinema City, thanks to the kind support of the Cinema management.

We very much appreciate the generosity of everyone who helps to organise and support events. Our thanks to all our volunteers at events including UEA Law students and other NCLS volunteers. A big thank you to our lecturer, Vera Baird, and to all the talented people who gave their time to support us, particularly our quiz experts Robert and Lorraine Ewell, to William Armstrong, our Honorary President, to NCLS managers and staff for the events they organise, and of course to our Marathon star, Chris Moore. We would also like to thank our various sponsors and partners for events, including the UEA Law School, Norfolk and Norwich Law Society, Spire Solicitors and Hatch Brenner Solicitors and Norfolk Community Safety Partnership, whose members generously supported the annual lecture.

We always need more help and ideas for fundraising and promotion! You can contact me via supporters@ncls.co.uk. You can also support NCLS through a regular subscription or donation. Please visit the Supporters page on the NCLS website www.ncls.co.uk.

Vanessa Morton
Chair, NCLS Supporters

Thank You

The Board of NCLS would like to thank the following for their generous support during 2016/17. Without the continuing support of our funders, supporting organisations, local legal firms and our volunteers, we would not have been able to continue to provide the level of services we do.

Funding Bodies and Sponsors

- Norwich Consolidated Charities
- Norwich City Council
- South Norfolk District Council
- Broadland District Council
- Norfolk County Council
- Big Lottery Fund
- Money Advice Service
- Comic Relief
- Norfolk & Norwich Law Society
- University of East Anglia
- Legal Education Foundation
- Mancroft Advice Service
- Mid-Norfolk CAB
- North Norfolk District Council
- Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council
- Cromer Town Council
- Norfolk Community Fund
- Eastern Legal Support Trust
- Access to Justice Foundation
- A B Charitable Trust
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Geoffrey Watling Trust
- Norwich Businesswomen's Network
- Norwich Cathedral
- Birketts Solicitors
- Hatch Brenner Solicitors
- Spire Solicitors
- Resolute Community Fund
- Victory Housing Trust
- Shaw Trust
- Shelroy Trust

Free Legal Advice & Domestic Abuse Rotas

All those firms and their solicitors who have so generously contributed to the Free Legal Advice and Domestic Abuse Rotas and also LawWorks, as well as ISCRE for providing our Discrimination Service.

Volunteers

All our volunteer advisers, law students, volunteer receptionists and administrators for their hard work and commitment throughout the year.

Sponsorship in Kind

- Spire Solicitors for use of their Boardroom & DX facilities
- Great Yarmouth Borough Council, KLARS & Norfolk CAB for use of an interview room

Individual Support

- The staff and volunteers of Voluntary Norfolk at St Clements House

Partner Organisations

All our partner organisations in Norfolk and regionally for their support and co-operation, particularly Norfolk, Mid-Norfolk & Diss & Thetford CABx, Age UK Norwich, Age UK Norfolk, Shelter, MAP, Equal Lives, KLARS, GYROS, Voluntary Norfolk, Suffolk Discrimination Service and CitA as well as Advice UK.

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FREE LEGAL ADVICE

15 Minutes free legal advice with a solicitor

Family & General advice drop-in Tuesdays

Employment and General advice drop-in on Fridays

You can register from 10.30am, appointments are limited and allocated on a first come, first served basis.

The advice session starts at 12pm

Also by appointment at Cromer and Great Yarmouth

FREE DEBT ADVICE

For vulnerable people or those with complex needs, including offenders, ex-offenders and their families

FREE WELFARE BENEFIT ADVICE

Advice and representation for welfare benefit appeals

FREE LEGAL ADVICE FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Appointments with a solicitor on Wednesday mornings

FREE DISCRIMINATION ADVICE

Provided by Suffolk Discrimination Law Service. For appointments call 01473 408111

FREE ADVICE FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Advice on residency, status and entitlement for EEA Nationals

Advice and representation for welfare benefit appeals

FREE FAMILY COURT SUPPORT SERVICE

Support for parents seeking child contact through the Courts

FREE RENT ARREARS MEDIATION SERVICE

For Norwich City Council (NCC) tenants. This service is accessed by referral from NCC only

Interpreters are available for all our services by arrangement



We hold the Advice Quality Standard Mark



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Donations to support NCLS can be made via:

www.btplc.com/mydonate, www.localgiving.com or www.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/ncls

Thank you to all our funders who include

