




**LAW  
FOR  
ALL**

PROTECTING THE  
LIFE YOU LIVE

**THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CAMPAIGN FOR LAW CENTRES**



**“All are equal before  
the law and are  
entitled without any  
discrimination to  
the equal protection  
of the law.”**

*Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

## LAW FOR ALL?

For 50 years, the UK's Law Centres have been standing up for people weighed down by legal problems, by providing access to justice for those not otherwise able to afford it.

As Law Centres mark the 50th anniversary of the movement, we must reflect on the critical threat to civil justice in the UK today. The principle of equal access to justice is not reflected in the reality of the current system, which is **underfunded, skewed in favour of wealthier individuals and organisations, and ill-equipped for the imminent challenges of a Covid-19-driven recession and its longer term social impact.**

This report sets out the current crisis in civil legal assistance funding and how it affects people across Britain. It will also propose a new funding model **to protect people's rights and ensure that justice can be accessed equally by all.**



*Mural outside the historic Bristol Law Centre*

# Executive Summary

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In the wake of Covid-19, calls to Law Centres for help on key issues such as employment rights have spiked - rising by anything between 90% to 500% between March and June across different regions

02

The demographic of people Law Centres help has changed during the pandemic, as traditional poorer clients are joined by people who have recently become impoverished

03

The term 'Justice Gap' relates to a significant part of the population who would not be able to afford to pay for legal assistance privately, but who would also not be able to be assisted by legal aid, because they are not poor enough to qualify for it.

04

A large proportion of wage earners fall in the Justice Gap, meaning they have a choice between no legal representation and living in poverty

05

It is estimated that 94% of working single parents fall in the Justice Gap, depending on their family's overall income and number of children

06

Working couples with younger children also fall into a 'squeezed middle' of the population, that could not afford legal costs should they require them, and would fall in the Justice Gap.

## Equality before the law should be a right, not a privilege; yet in Britain in 2020 it is a myth.

A significant proportion of the population cannot currently afford legal representation without making an impossible choice between their human right to justice and supporting the basic needs of their family and loved ones.

This report reveals a hidden 'Justice Gap' between legal aid thresholds and the personal income required to afford average legal costs without falling into poverty. **Our data shows that millions of working people in Britain could now face the cruel choice between poverty and injustice if they have a problem requiring legal assistance** such as employment dismissal; housing evictions; family or marriage disputes and custody appeals.

Single parents are particularly at risk: 94% of working single parents would fall in the Justice Gap if they were responsible for the care of three primary school aged children. Even with just one dependent child at this young age, 76% of working single parents would be pushed into poverty in order to cover legal costs should the need arise.

This deficit crosses many income barriers and personal circumstances, affecting people who may consider their rights and protections secure. A working couple with three young children would need annual household earnings of over £100,000 to afford legal protection without pushing their family into poverty and giving up some basics.

This finding comes at a time when more people are facing financial and social instability due to the economic aftershock of Covid-19. With job losses expected to increase once the furlough scheme nears its end and tenancy disputes expected to increase when evictions resume in late August, more people who find themselves needing legal protection will find the system prohibitively expensive.

Law Centres are well placed to meet this increased need: providing community law expertise and cost-effective legal support to those impacted. **Indeed, the number of people turning to Law Centres for employment advice has risen five-fold** in some parts of the country. However, among them a new client group is emerging: people who before Covid-19 lived in relative financial security but on losing their jobs discover

that the systemic protections they assumed would be there 'just in case' are not able to support them. This group, which we call **Living Outside of Legal Aid (LOLAs)**, demonstrates the increase in legal need across the population, and the need for additional resources to support Law Centres and supplement the legal aid system.

The need for Law Centres has never been greater. Their 50 year history suggests stability but their **long term sustainability is not guaranteed**. Over the last decade of austerity cuts many have faced financial challenges and **1 in 5 has closed their doors for good**. Emergency government funding in June helped ensure Law Centres can keep their doors open in the initial pandemic period, but they must become financially sustainable in the long-term if they are to meet the growing public need for legal protection.



Foreword by Julie Bishop,  
*Director of Law Centres Network*

17 July 2020 marks 50 years since the first Law Centre in the UK opened its doors. For half a century, Law Centre lawyers across the country have devoted their life's work to fighting for people who cannot otherwise resolve their problems without legal assistance.

Over these 50 years, Law Centres have helped well over 3 million people to stay in their homes, keep their jobs, access support they were entitled to, fight the denial of services, fight wrong decisions and fight back against abuses of power.

This fiftieth anniversary comes in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, when Law Centres could not be more needed. As a recession is building, as 9.7m furloughed workers face grim prospects of potential job loss, as businesses collapse, as families try to rebuild their lives following illness and death, Law Centres need to stand firm for their local communities. Law Centres have the resources to help people navigate their way through a seemingly impenetrable justice system, to access assistance and resolve legal problems that hold them back from moving on in their lives.

The difficult timing of our anniversary presents Law Centres with a challenge: how can we ensure that we have sufficient resources to continue this work today, tomorrow and for the next 50 years?

**We want to seize this opportunity to draw attention in this report to the vital work we do, not only to highlight its importance but to attract the necessary financial support for facing this challenge.**

State support for legal assistance, mostly through legal aid, is simply not enough: it is poorly paid and covers too few issues. What's more, even legal aid is unaffordable for many who need it and are otherwise eligible for it.

This is the phenomenon that we want to focus on here: what Professor Donald Hirsch of Loughborough University has dubbed the 'Justice Gap'. The fact is that you need to earn a lot to afford to pay privately for legal assistance, but that even people eligible for legal aid are often priced out of it by strict rules.

**The Justice Gap means that facing a sudden legal problem with your home or job or benefits is like having a sinkhole open beneath you, swallowing up your time, money and attention.** People often find that worrying about their legal problems consumes their thoughts, their peace of mind, their sleep and their health.

It is a scary experience and we want as many people as possible to escape it. Law Centres must step in to bridge the Justice Gap. There are challenges to overcome here but inaction is not an option to us. We can do it, with your help.

The founding objective of the first Law Centre in North Kensington, working out of an old butcher's shop on Golborne Road, was to solve the contradiction of 'two standards of law, one for the rich and one for the poor' by giving 'first place to the poor client'. These words, of the Centre's founder Peter Kandler, still ring true today.

This report aims to do two things. First, we want to look at Law Centres' response to the Covid-19 crisis, and how we have responded to the increased legal need in our communities. Then, we want to look ahead, size up the challenge of the Justice Gap and consider how we build a movement fit to meet it – with your help.

Today we invite you to walk with us and those we serve by joining forces with us for the coming weeks and months. Let us work together to 'build back better' people's access to justice in the UK!





# Context: The Rising Covid-19 Justice Crisis

The changing demand for Law Centres' services since the beginning of the pandemic and how Law Centres are adapting to help their clients.



## FINDINGS

Data reveals a dramatic change in the needs of communities that Law Centres serve:

- Employment law enquiries have increased dramatically, with workers asking about their rights to access the furlough scheme and the threat of unfair dismissal
- The demographic of Law Centre clients has changed and a new group of Living Outside of Legal Aid (LOLA) individuals are finding themselves in need of support that is not covered by Legal Aid funding. These new clients may be more aware of their rights than more traditional clients, but they are often first time users of Law Centre services
- Many traditional clients who rely on face-to-face services due to language and health barriers, or who cannot access digital services due to poverty or inexperience, now largely do not access Law Centre services or other frontline advice services
- Law Centres predict a great surge in housing cases as possession hearings resume in late August. Despite the government's suspension of evictions during lockdown, landlords are still attempting to evict tenants, often in vulnerable situations
- Increased distress among communities is evidenced by a rise in support for bereaved people that Law Centres are now required to do, as in a marked increase in suicidal callers
- Law Centres have proved to be a vital part of community responses to the pandemic, working with mutual aid groups, local MPs and other charities to ensure that people in need receive professional legal advice

Across the advice sector, services which provide access to justice are struggling to keep up with a rise in demand. As the Legal Services Board's Data Bulletin for June 2020 shows:

- 67% increase in employment enquiries at Citizens Advice Bureaux in May 2020 compared to May 2019.
- Citizens Advice Bureaux received 4.4 million views of their benefits advice page on their website, from 23rd March - 7th July, unprecedented traffic for their website.
- A 551% increase on starts to Universal Credit in April 2020 compared to April 2019.
- The number of outstanding Crown court cases has increased by 20% from April 2019 (33,670) to April 2020 (40,459). In Magistrates' courts the number has increased by 30% (from 301,046 to 391,615).<sup>1</sup>

This section explores the trends in greater detail and in reference to specific case needs.

### Methodology and Evidence

On Tuesday 2nd June, a roundtable discussion was held with representatives from over 20 different Law Centres. They described the changing nature of demand on the ground, how they had adapted their services, and shared examples of the critical nature of their work. A variety of official and reputable sources were also drawn upon to detail national trends such as Universal Credit claims, unemployment projections and a rise in domestic violence. These were primarily government and Bank of England figures, but also draw on figures provided by charities such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Refuge. Please see references at the end of the report for more detail.



## Case Study - Sitting in Limbo

In July 1969, Delbert Clarke came to the UK aged 13. Like many of the Windrush generation, he was never given, and didn't claim, documents that would prove his citizenship. He had no idea he would ever need to. In 2011, he was evicted by his landlord after complaining about the property he was renting. He approached the council for help, but they asked him to prove his status.

That was the start of a four-year ordeal in which he was repeatedly made homeless.

**“All of a sudden you got no papers, no one knows who you are. I can't explain, it's so emotional, what I've been through cos of Windrush. The nights I spent on the streets. Homelessness, it's a wicked thing, it's a wicked thing.”**

After the Windrush scandal broke, Hackney Community Law Centre helped him challenge the Home Office, and secure his right to remain and access to housing. “If it weren't for the Law Centre, I wouldn't be sitting here,” he says.

## EMPLOYMENT

The coronavirus lockdown has produced an unprecedented shift in employment patterns:

- As of 5 July 2020, 9.4 million workers have been placed onto the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, accounting for over a quarter of the workforce.<sup>2</sup>
- The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Forecast predicts a rise in unemployment to 9% during 2020, qualifying that this could dramatically change in the months ahead depending on the outcome of the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>
- Accounting firm KPMG, in their June report Hard Times, predicts that unemployment could rise to 11% in the UK in 2021.<sup>4</sup>
- The UK is expected to spend at least £80bn, 3.7% of annual GDP, on extra support for the unemployed, self-employed and workers who have been furloughed by the end of October.<sup>5</sup>
- From the start of the pandemic until the end of May there have been 5,000 new single claims at the Employment Tribunal, increasing its backlog by 17%. Many more are expected to follow as furlough periods end and redundancies increase.

### Increased Need

Law Centres have seen first hand the impact these trends have on clients, and they report increased worry in their communities over job security as a result of the pandemic. Centres from Northern Ireland to Liverpool to Camden have seen 'spikes' in people calling their advice lines to ask for help accessing the furlough scheme. **In Camden, employment enquiries have risen by 25% between 23 March and 8 June. The most dramatic figure comes from Suffolk Law Centre, where employment and work discrimination cases have increased fivefold in the period between 6th April - 6th June.**

The rise in cases in Suffolk, a specialist in employment discrimination, can be largely explained by employers prioritising productivity and costs over the physical and economic safety of their staff. Employees with underlying health conditions who were advised to self-isolate have come to the Law Centre seeking advice after employers placed them on Statutory Sick Pay rather than the furlough scheme. Other clients have approached the Law Centre after employers had denied them the opportunity to work from home, and in some cases simply fired and replaced them while they self-isolated. Such behaviour has been reported across the country, with employers large and small adopting a "fire and rehire" strategy to their workforce, leaving affected staff in economic limbo.



In May, a pregnant healthcare worker in South London on an agency contract through NHS Professionals was left without work or pay for eight weeks as the coronavirus pandemic hit. South West London Law Centre believed this was a breach of the UK's Employment Rights Act 1996.

**"I want to be helping them fight the coronavirus in hospital, but I can't risk being there," she said. "Another colleague who was pregnant saw her child die, so I can't risk myself and my baby.**

**I'm really struggling, but I don't have a choice. That's why I called the Law Centre to see if they could help me. Money is my problem now, so when the Law Centre said they could get me a solicitor but I wouldn't have to pay for it, I was so relieved."**



The Equality and Employment Law Centre is a specialist Law Centre based in Liverpool, established in 2003 to give specialist advice to both employees and third sector employers. It has seen a similarly **dramatic rise of 90% in employment enquiries from the beginning of lockdown until 2nd June**. The majority of people were asking for help in accessing the furlough scheme, and employees who had been threatened with redundancy.

One of the unique services the Centre provides is advice to small charitable employers who have no HR support and cannot afford expensive solicitors' fees. As its Director Julie Ehlen pointed out, 'it can be really daunting for managers to deal with HR matters such as performance, capability, absence management or workplace disputes.' One such charitable organisation called the Centre its '4th emergency service', after receiving help from the Centre in handling both complicated disciplinary and discrimination matters.

## LOLAs: a demographic in unmet need

Covid-19 has not only led to more enquiries and new cases, but also to an expansion of the population in legal need. As a larger proportion of the population faces uncertainty over their employment status or indeed lose their jobs, more will need to seek legal advice to defend themselves from unfair dismissal and protect their rights and livelihoods. Law Centres are essential to meeting these concerns, of individuals often Living Outside of Legal Aid (LOLA) thresholds, who cannot therefore access public funded help.

Sean Canning, Director of Hackney and Camden Community Law Centres, noted a particular rise in the number of clients who had previously been in stable employment: 'You're dealing with people who are more aware of their workplace issues, but less experienced in dealing with our advice sector.'

South West London Law Centres have also noticed this change. Director Patrick Marples has been seeing more 'people who are professionals but have been hit by landlords and employers' seeking advice. Likewise, Ursula O'Hare of Law Centre NI spoke of how 'self-employed people who have never used the service before' were driving increased demand for employment advice in the region, which had 'gone through the roof'.

**On average 27.6% of clients have a disability and 52.25% have a long-term health condition**, often accompanied by mental health problems. For these more vulnerable clients, Law Centres normally provide a friendly, accessible service, whose immediacy is lost over the telephone. Pamela Fitzpatrick, director of Harrow Law Centre, suggested that accessibility might be an issue as well, worrying that 'we are losing some of our more traditional clients, people who just turn up on the doorstep normally'.

Michael Fawole, director of North East Law Centre, had seen a similar pattern, despite the Centre's employment line 'being hammered' by callers, with **new enquiries rising by 44.4% between April and June**. Traditional clients who 'are the most vulnerable, and suffer from mental health problems, don't engage when it comes to digital services', also partly due to the cost of accessing the internet.

## HOUSING

### The post-COVID challenge

Renters in Britain face challenging times.

- Nearly **9 million households** - together more than a third of all families - rent from a private landlord, a housing association, or the council.<sup>6</sup>
- Due to the Covid-19 crisis, the government suspended evictions until late August, with tenants still liable for paying rent arrears.
- The stay on evictions was greeted by Law Centres as 'tremendous news for tenants', although more continue to fall into rent arrears
- **One in five renters have had to choose between paying food or rent**
- **One in four have had to voluntarily leave their properties** to find alternative accommodation.<sup>7</sup>
- Martin South, director of Tower Hamlets Law Centre, predicts that 'the pressure behind the dam will be released when the special measures end'

### Calm before the Storm

On 27 March, the government imposed a suspension of all housing possession action. Evictions hearings will not be heard until 24 August at the earliest. Although they cannot for now be evicted, tenants are still required to pay rent and, if they are financially unable to do so, the government has said that they should work together with landlords 'to exhaust all possible options - to ensure cases don't end up in court' when the suspension is lifted.

The impact of the stay on evictions has had mixed effects on demand for housing advice from Law Centres. In some places, demand has 'fallen off a cliff', according to Richard Hazell of Wiltshire Law Centre. Pauline Gilson of Luton Law Centre reports a similar situation: '**our housing case intake, when including the court duty scheme, has fallen by around 90%, and housing telephone enquiries have fallen by around 70% between 16 March and 15 June.**' With tenants now protected from eviction by the law, they feel in less need of immediate specialist advice to keep them in their property.

At other Centres however, callers who have never used the service before are getting in touch to ask for advice. Vicky Fewkes of Ealing Law Centre highlighted that people were seeking advice at an earlier stage than previously. An increase in housing advice enquiries was also seen in Tower Hamlets Law Centre, as tenants call earlier, anticipating tension with their landlords to escalate as the end of the stay on evictions draws nearer.

### Illegal evictions

Tenants plunged into instability by loss of income need to be made aware of their rights, as in some parts of the country landlords continue to evict, but unlawfully. Pauline Gilson, director of Luton Law Centre explained that:

**“Clients are becoming increasingly stressed and anxious about the situations they are finding themselves in. Private landlords have for several weeks been using various tactics to pursue rent arrears including misleading tenants about the possession process, disconnecting utilities, and sending numerous messages to clients via various means.”**

**“The stress and anxiety clients are experiencing is reflected in how they give their instructions and their decision making. It is making the taking of instructions time consuming, stressful and exhausting. The majority of the people contacting us have been unable to afford to pay their rent due to losing their income as a result of Covid-19; some of them have No Recourse to Public Funds.”**

## “Social landlords have, in the last few weeks, started to pursue tenants for rent arrears and started issuing notices seeking possession.”

In Harrow, the local Law Centre has been defending grieving families from landlords wanting to quickly dispose of the deceased’s possessions. As director Pamela Fitzpatrick explains, ‘a lot of the initial advice (to grieving family members) surrounding Covid-19 was to stay put and don’t accept’ the threats from landlords - which have included instances of spitting at clients - to clear properties faster.

Illegal evictions have taken place in Harrow throughout the pandemic despite the government’s suspension, the local Law Centre reports. Fitzpatrick said police had shown a lack of understanding of the stay on evictions, and a reluctance to act when presented with examples. In one instance in late June, a landlord’s attempt to evict a man with mental health problems was actually aided by the police, she said, who told the terrified tenant that he should return his key to the landlord. The Law Centre has had to apply for an injunction against the eviction and have told the landlord he faced legal action if he were to proceed.

Fitzpatrick warns that this work is now ‘common’ for the Law Centre. She admits that Harrow, which has a high proportion of larger, multi-generational families living in private rented properties, was a ‘disaster waiting to happen’. Private landlords did not mind taking illegal action, while exposure to Covid-19 was high: at 64%, the excess death rate in Harrow is three times that of the national average. In some areas, then, the stay on evictions has not relieved pressure on tenants - or Law Centres.



## Case Study - Changing Policy

Lorraine Cox, who was diagnosed with motor neurone disease, was required to search for work for months after medically retiring because of her condition and had to undergo medical assessment for both universal credit (UC) and personal independence payment (PIP). This is due to the legal definition of a terminal illness which requires people to prove they would ‘reasonably be expected’ to die within six months.

Lorraine said: “The process of seeking to obtain benefits has continually exacerbated my stress levels and anxiety. I have had to constantly fight to get the same entitlement to benefits as other people who are terminally ill. Despite being diagnosed with a terminal illness I was refused fast track access to additional support and had to show that I was searching for work in order to receive universal credit.

Law Centre NI has assisted Lorraine in bringing a Judicial Review. They argued that “the six month rule was introduced over 30 years ago and was intended to assist people in accessing special terminal illness rules, not restrict them. It is now hurting terminally ill people who have an illness that’s more difficult to accurately predict.”

This month the High Court found that the terminal illness policy was applied in a discriminatory way and was therefore unlawful. This important decision would help not just Lorraine but many in her position across the UK.

**“I wouldn’t wish my experience on anyone. I believe the system has failed me and the approach to dealing with people who have a terminal illness needs urgently addressed. I have accepted my path in life now but please don’t put anyone else through it.”**

## WELFARE RIGHTS

As expected, given the projected rise in unemployment post-COVID, Universal Credit claims have risen dramatically in the past few months:

- On one day in April, the Universal Credit phone line received **2.2 millions calls**.<sup>8</sup>
- **The number of people claiming work-related benefits - which includes but is not limited to the unemployed - was up 126% to 2.8 million**, with analysts suggesting poorer areas were being hit hardest.<sup>9</sup>
- An estimated **700,000 people have been unable to access their claims** however, creating an unprecedented backlog.<sup>10</sup>
- The result is a **122% rise in foodbank parcels** given out to children between February and March. A crisis is already underway.<sup>11</sup>

### Left in Limbo

People claiming welfare benefits normally contact Law Centres at a crucial stage, when they have been refused benefits or given only a partial offer, and they need to prove their entitlement in a tribunal appeal. At the start of the pandemic, these people have had to wait an average of 37 weeks to be heard.

The Department of Work and Pensions announced on 16 March that in-person assessments for claimants of Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) - the main disability and sickness benefits - were paused for 3 months. For ESA claimants, they had to live on the basic Job Seeker's Allowance rate of £74.25 a week, often not enough for people with increased living costs because of their disability. For PIP claimants, who have no other income while waiting to be assessed, things were even harder.

While assessments, outsourced to contractor companies, were moved online, Nathan Fitzpatrick of the Law Centres Network suspects that many were not happening at all. Michael Fawole from North East Law Centre agrees, pointing out the 'common problem' of anxiety affecting clients in the months they wait to be assessed. A similar phenomenon was seen in Harrow, where the number of assessments dried up very quickly at the start of the pandemic.

Local authority support for people in this situation can alleviate some of this stress, but it is a postcode lottery. While in Newcastle people were assisted by a moratorium on debt enforcement and a loosening of sanctions, caseworkers in Bristol felt 'powerless' to help clients who were not being assessed.

When Law Centres are able to challenge unfair and wrong benefits assessments, they can alleviate anxiety for clients, who often suffer from complex problems, as the following case demonstrates. Without initial assessments, clients' cases are unable to progress.



In Northern Ireland, Michael O'Donnell is challenging the decision to refuse him bereavement payments because his recently deceased wife, Pauline, had been severely disabled due to a degenerative condition and unable to pay National Insurance contributions.

"After Pauline's death I couldn't afford to do things with the kids to take their mind off what had happened. I still owe money for the funeral costs," Michael said. "Our income as a household had massively decreased. There have been days when we scraped together food or couldn't afford to heat the house. It all really took a toll on me and the family.

**"I have been so involved in the whole process of appealing the decision that I feel guilty I didn't give enough time to my kids, all I have left of Pauline, besides my memories."**

That is when the Law Centre in Northern Ireland stepped in. They are working to establish whether the department acted lawfully, or whether the decision amounted to disability discrimination.

If they are successful in securing him the payments he so desperately needs, the case will not only help Michael but also help ensure others don't have to go through a similar experience in the future.



## FAMILY LAW

The lockdown has disrupted other parts of Law Centres' work, such as family law advice on matters like family breakdown, child contact and domestic violence - all areas where the pandemic is predicted to result in increased need, similar to regular post-Christmas spikes. While specialist law firms can expect considerable revenue from high net worth clients, Law Centres will be supporting those for whom family breakdown is worsened by inability to afford legal costs. A particularly concerning problem in this context is domestic violence.

### Domestic violence - a new pandemic:

- There were **17,275 recorded domestic abuse incidents in London alone between 9 March and 19 April**, which can include family rows not recorded as crimes; a 9% rise compared to the same period last year.
- **Police cautions and charges for domestic violence were up by 24%** in London during the same period.<sup>12</sup>
- Calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, run by Refuge, have spiked significantly since mid-March, seeing an on average increase of around **50% in calls and over 400% in visits to its website** since lockdown measures began.<sup>13</sup>

### The Law Centres Respond

Law Centre advisors usually deal mostly with Child Arrangement Orders, and parents wishing to change a child's name or seek their whereabouts. North East Law Centre's experience on their family law advice line reflects the spike in domestic abuse around the country. **Calls from women who had been attacked by their partners and had no place to go have gone 'through the roof', with a 64% rise in new enquiries** between April to June.

The transition from in-person to remote services due to the pandemic has brought further challenges. Suffolk Law Centre had to close their help desk at Ipswich Family Court, which had supported 39 people from 11 January to 15 March. Still, they were able to offer a Family Support Clinic over the phone, with three volunteer lawyers speaking to 35 people between 23 March and 26 June.



The reduced capacity has meant that many clients with urgent enquiries have had to be turned away, as paralegal Myriam Naoul points out. This meant that the true figure for lockdown demand was likely to be higher than the number of people benefiting from the service. Director Audrey Ludwig agrees that Suffolk Law Centre's virtual support has been 'far less effective' than their in-person services. She believes that 'clients have been less responsive' due to the lack of face-face contact that was so important for establishing trust.

Family law cases can often be challenging, especially when domestic violence is complicated by a client's immigration status. Harrow Law Centre have recently assisted a client who, when lockdown began, was escorted from her home by police after suffering from domestic violence. As the partner of an EU national, she had a right to remain and to access benefits support, but was initially denied it, facing homelessness and deportation before the Law Centre got involved.



## IMMIGRATION

The demand for immigration support initially plummeted during the COVID crisis, before stabilising to a normal level. Luton Law Centre, in a town with a higher proportion of non-British born nationals than most of the UK, encapsulates this trend. According to director Pauline Gilson, 'immigration cases dropped by 100% in April, but have now picked up to near normal levels. Immigration telephone enquiries dropped by around 75% in April and have now returned to near normal levels.'



A similar trend was seen in the North East, where director Michael Fawole argued that the impact of the lockdown on immigration produced a 'national picture' where cases suddenly dropped. With the closure of embassies around the world, and the Home Office's refusal to accept applications, many migrants were left in limbo about their immigration status. Eventually the Home Office opened up residual services, largely electronically, which saw new monthly enquiries rates pick up by 44.7% between April and June.

Fawole reports that clients have been stressed and confused by the government's messaging around their right to remain during the pandemic, especially against the background of the government's notorious Hostile Environment policies. EU citizens in the UK, who have limited time to apply for Settled Status, were caught out by lockdown: they had to upload documents electronically to a Home Office Portal, which often was not working; others were unable to even try, as their low income meant they had no access to the internet or a smartphone.

Even as the Home Office stopped making Settled Status decisions, the Law Centre continued to gather evidence for clients' cases but could do nothing beyond that. A 'complete nightmare' for clients ensued, as anxious clients realised that all decisions had been paused. Clients' panic has driven the resurgence in cases, agrees Gilson. She noted that there has been a rush of people who have left their residence claims late. In the context of the UK's new immigration system, and the fact that deportations continue to take place during the pandemic, clients' heightened anxiety is understandable.<sup>14</sup>

## Case Study - Black Lives Matter

In the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests, Ingrid Antoine-Onikoyi and her husband Falil experienced systemic police racism for themselves.

While driving back from visiting an elderly relative, they were stopped by police and harassed.

Fortunately Ingrid filmed the incident. Turning to Suffolk Law Centre for help, the police were rapidly forced to issue an apology leaving the couple grateful for their support.

**"Audrey at Suffolk Law Centre's support, legal information and guidance has been tremendously helpful," Ingrid said. "It made us feel comfortable to progress the complaint against the police."**

The Centre founded the Stop and Search Reference Group to give BAME communities in Suffolk a voice, by allowing them to complain in person to local constabulary chiefs about police practice. The Group, who meet bi-monthly, is attempting to unpick the issues contributing to the paradox that sees more Black and Minority Ethnic people stopped and searched than white people in Ipswich.



## FACING THE CHALLENGES OF LOCKDOWN



Law Centres have been on the frontline of the public response to the pandemic:

- Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre have created a Food Bank leaflet delivery scheme. Every parcel delivered from Olympia Food Bank contains a leaflet detailing the relevant phone line to call for legal advice
- They have also taken referrals from the local MP's constituency office, after his caseworkers were inundated with calls for help few of which they could assist
- Harrow Law Centre have received referrals from mutual aid groups set up during the pandemic and have given specialist legal advice to vulnerable people in the community not eligible for legal aid
- They also run online sessions in over 10 local schools to provide information on key legal rights to vulnerable parents, continuing a pre-pandemic programme
- Birmingham Community Law Centre have worked closely with local homelessness charities, helping at least 100 homeless people into temporary hotel accommodation. For director Michael Bates the next challenge would be to give them all legal advice when the council turns them out, to ensure they do not return to sleeping rough
- North East Law Centre was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund to provide supermarket vouchers and pay for gas bills for clients facing severe hardship

## Helping the Bereaved

Law Centres have also responded to the most distressing aspects of the pandemic, providing assistance to those who have lost loved ones to the virus. Solicitor Ngaryan Li, of Vauxhall Law Centre in Liverpool, noticed a spike in enquiries related to bereavement during the pandemic. In response, she put together a funeral support package to help those who otherwise would not know where to turn and struggle to afford undertaker costs. She explains:



“Within our community, we have seen a huge spike in death rates compared to other parts of the country. April’s ONS figures showed that Covid 19 related deaths were running at an average 36.2 per 100,000 in England and Wales. In the most deprived areas the average rate was 55.1 and the least deprived 25.3. However, the figure for Liverpool was much worse - 74.2, compared to 55.5 in Manchester and 39.2 in Leeds.<sup>15</sup>

“We started work on a bereavement support service working with other organisations to provide effective referrals. We provide information on what to do immediately after someone dies, such as approaching the registry office, finding funeral directors and fair price funeral schemes, and sorting out wills and probate and burial plots. We then provide information on where families can access bereavement counselling and family mediation; how they can secure compassionate leave from work; and how they can deal with complex legal issues such as the deceased’s pension, housing and other liabilities.

“Our specialists will then help with a wide range of benefits issues including benefit checks for the bereaved families, applying for social grants and appeals. We will also help with dealing with debts of the deceased or ongoing family debt issues. Even though it is very difficult, we believe this is a vital role for us coming out of Covid-19. It is our connection with the community that keeps us fighting to protect their rights and to help with whatever issues are prevalent.”

Dealing with this scale of deaths may be new for Law Centres, but before the pandemic they had been supporting suicidal clients on a regular basis. Clients asking for help often suffer from mental health problems which, combined with the threat of eviction, job loss or poverty often leads to feelings of hopelessness and suicidal thoughts. In these situations, Law Centres play a decisive role in reassuring those at risk that all is not lost and pulling them back from the brink.



The pandemic and its economic impact have aggravated this, and **the number of callers reporting suicidal thoughts has grown by an estimated 300%**, according to Employment and Equality Centre director Julie Ehlen. Waiting for months for tribunal hearings, which often get postponed or cancelled at the last minute is not helping. She explained that ‘the fear and uncertainty of Covid-19 has added to the immense pressure (people) are under.’ In one example, after the Law Centre reported immediate concerns for the caller, ‘the police arrived and sectioned them while we were still on the phone. That call saved the client’s life’.



# Filling the Justice Gap

Access to justice is currently unaffordable to a large proportion of the population. Law Centres offer a cost-efficient solution but need a more sustainable and diversified funding model to meet the changing needs of British people.

## THE JUSTICE GAP

With the global recession, and the UK pandemic beginning to take its toll, more people are finding themselves in need of legal representation, but also discovering that legal aid support will not be available for their case.

This “Justice Gap” is due to the present structure of the legal system, and the erosion of legal aid means that large swathes of the population are at risk of falling into poverty, should they be required to pay average legal fees.

Developed and calculated by Professor Donald Hirsch of Loughborough University, the Justice Gap describes the difference between the maximum earnings at which someone can get legal aid and the amount they would need to earn to cover their own legal costs through income.

If a person earns more than the maximum threshold for legal aid, but earns below the amount they would need to afford legal costs without falling below the Minimum Income Standard, then they can be said to fall in the Justice Gap. **Put simply, they cannot afford legal assistance without sacrificing a life essential.**

Without organisations like Law Centres, the Justice Gap means the choice most people face when requiring legal assistance is stark: **either live in poverty, or live with injustice.**



Professor Donald Hirsch,  
Director of the Centre for  
Research in Social Policy,  
Loughborough University

“Access to justice requires ordinary individuals to be able to afford legal fees. For the large proportion of the population with limited or no savings, this means costs being affordable out of income. Our research on the Minimum Income Standard sets a benchmark of affordability, showing how much people need to purchase the day to day expenses considered essential to meet material needs and participate in society. For those facing legal costs, this standard shows how much they need to earn in order to still have enough to live on after covering legal expenses.

“The legal aid system is meant to ensure that people with limited disposable income can still afford legal services. However, our research shows clearly that the legal aid means test excludes people with well below what they need for a decent standard of living. In fact, to afford average legal fees out of income, you typically need to be earning well above average.

“This Justice Gap is a form of the squeeze that modest to middle earners can face when they have too much income to be eligible for help from the state, but not enough to provide fully for themselves. In the case of covering legal costs, the range of people caught in this squeeze goes much further up the income scale than is the case for more ordinary expenses. For example, some families have means that make them ineligible for free school meals, but still find it hard to cover the cost of food - but this is unlikely to apply to families earning say £50,000 a year. Justice is different quite simply because it is far more expensive.

“We need to decide as a nation whether we are committed to ensuring that income constraints do not restrict access to justice in those areas where we think it should be open to all. If so, the help given to those unable to afford it needs to extend to a far wider range of people than those on the very lowest incomes who currently qualify for legal aid.”

# Who falls in the Justice Gap?

For individual taxpayers



94%

of working single parents **with 3 primary school children** would have to choose between poverty or no legal protection



83%

of working single parents **with 2 secondary school children** would have to choose between poverty or no legal protection



76%

of working single parents **with 1 primary school child** would have to choose between poverty or no legal protection



44%

of working single individuals **with no children** would have to choose between poverty or no legal protection

## For working couples (assuming both earn half of total income)



74%

of working parents **with 3 primary school children and 1 secondary school child** would have to choose between poverty or no legal protection



65%

of working parents **with 3 primary school children** would have to choose between poverty or no legal protection



51%

of working parents **with 1 newborn child** would have to choose between poverty or no legal protection

## This means that:

A **significant majority** of single parents would face a choice between **poverty or legal representation** should they require it.

**Nearly half** of all single, childless individuals fall in the Justice Gap.

A **majority** of couples with multiple children in either primary or secondary school fall in the Justice Gap.

There is a 'squeezed middle' for couples with multiple young children, locking people otherwise thought of as middle to high income out of **accessing justice**.



## Case Study - A Place to Call Home

**“I was fleeing domestic violence, so I had nothing with me when I left my home.”**

Despite fleeing domestic violence, Salma had no right to remain when she left her home. Her case is one Law Centres are familiar with, where a vulnerable woman fleeing abuse faces the threat of deportation.

**“I did not have any family, I did not have any support from anyone else, the Law Centre was the only place I could come. I had just a week until deportation.”**

‘If the Law Centre hadn’t helped me, I would have been sent back to Pakistan. Because I was fleeing domestic violence the community where I belong wouldn’t accept me because it’s a matter of honour and a matter of shame to get separated or divorced. I’m even scared that they might have killed me in the name of honour. I have a three year old son. If it wasn’t for the Law Centre I might not even be alive today.’

## METHODOLOGY

The Justice Gap calculator works as such

- 01** Information about a household is inputted into a calculator, such as whether the household includes a single individual or a couple, and whether or not that individual/couple have children, and the children’s ages.
- 02** This information is used to work out at what annual income level this individual/couple/family would be able to receive some civil legal aid.
- 03** This information is also used to work out the average monthly costs of childcare, as well as average monthly rent costs.
- 04** Average civil legal costs over a month are then considered. This is a constant figure in all calculations, and remains at £3,000 to be paid over 6 months.
- 05** Once the variable household data has been inputted, the calculator provides a level of income. A person would have to earn this level of income to remain above the Minimum Income Standard, when the average civil legal costs, the monthly rent and the childcare costs are deducted from the income level.
- 06** If a person earns more than the level needed to access civil legal aid, but below the level needed to pay their costs without falling below the minimum income standard, then they are in the ‘Justice Gap’.

This produces a figure for the % of wage earners who would fall in the Justice Gap, by subtracting the percentile of the population that earn below the eligibility level for legal aid, from the percentile of the population that earn below the ‘earnings needed to afford legal costs’ level. For coupled households, to produce a figure we have assumed each partner earns half of total household income.



Table demonstrating selection of different Justice Gap scenarios

Type of Household relationship	Children Under 2	Children 2-4	Primary School Children	Secondary School Children	Household Earnings Needed to afford legal costs	Max earnings for legal aid	% of earners caught in the Justice Gap*
Single	0	0	0	0	£28,100	£15,500	44%
Single	1	0	0	0	£49,200	£26,000	33%
Single	1	1	0	0	£68,300	£26,000	39%
Single	0	0	1	0	£39,800	£8,000	76%
Single	0	0	1	1	£47,800	£7,800	85%
Single	0	0	0	1	£37,400	£6,100	74%
Single	0	0	0	2	£45,300	£5,900	83%
Single	1	1	1	0	£78,800	£26,000	41%
Single	0	0	3	0	£70,200	£11,600	94%
Single	0	0	1	2	£60,800	£7,600	91%
Coupled	0	0	0	0	£34,800	£17,000	24%
Coupled	1	0	0	0	£51,600	£24,000	51%
Coupled	1	1	0	0	£62,200	£26,400	59%
Coupled	0	1	0	0	£43,000	£10,200	39%
Coupled	0	1	1	0	£53,800	£11,800	54%
Coupled	0	0	1	0	£42,200	£9,200	39%
Coupled	0	0	0	1	£39,800	£6,800	32%
Coupled	0	0	1	1	£50,000	£9,000	51%
Coupled	1	2	0	0	£73,800	£52,000	18%
Coupled	0	1	2	0	£63,600	£14,600	65%
Coupled	0	0	1	2	£58,600	£8,800	61%
Coupled	2	2	0	0	£107,800	£52,000	35%
Coupled	0	1	2	1	£73,400	£14,400	72%
Coupled	0	0	3	1	£74,200	£12,600	74%

\*for couples, assumes each individual earns half of the overall earnings

56%

of earners caught in the Justice Gap from this selection of results

## KEY FINDINGS

Not having children obviously reduces average household costs, and therefore lowers the amount of income one needs to afford legal costs without falling into poverty. It does however lower the income threshold for receiving legal aid.

**01** 44% of single workers without children fall into the Justice Gap (below).

**02** Living with another earner obviously reduces the burden of legal costs on one individual. This explains why only 24% of earners living in couples with no children would fall into the Justice Gap (below), compared to 44% of single people with no children.

**03** The more children a parent has, the more likely they are to fall in the Justice Gap. For example, 76% of working single parents with 1 primary school child would have to choose between no legal representation or poverty. While this is over 3 quarters of all single working parents, it is lower than the 94% of working single parents with 3 primary school children who would fall in the Justice Gap (below). If a couple with multiple children were to divorce, or one partner were to die, most remaining single parents would be left in a very precarious position.

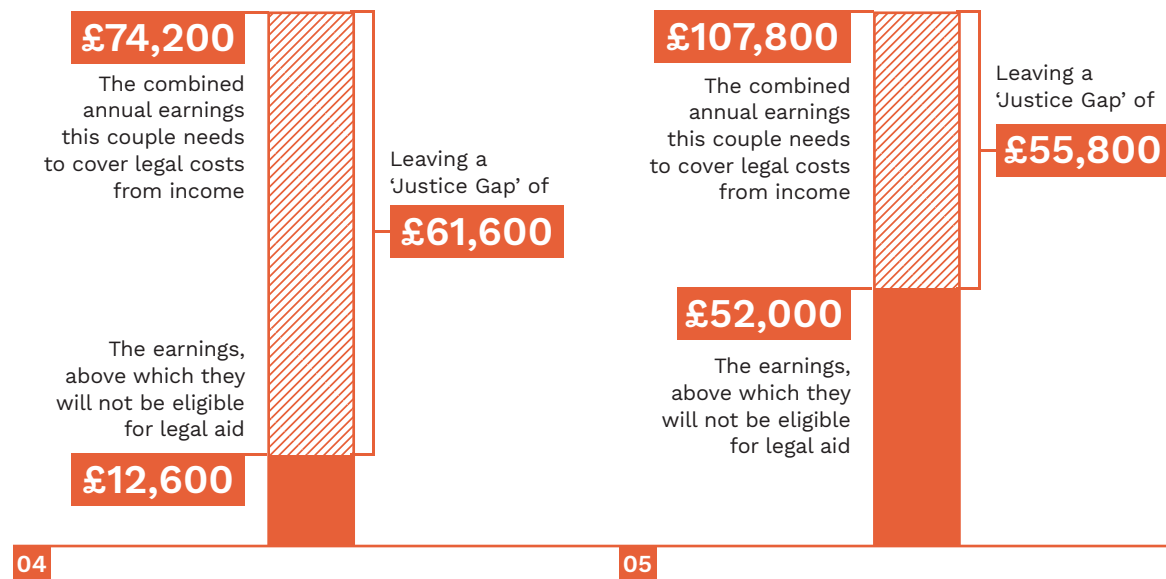


As children get older, childcare costs decrease, bringing the required annual earnings down. This does also however lower the level of earnings at which someone will not be eligible for legal aid, and so produces a very high Justice Gap. For example, 91% of working single parents with one primary school child and two secondary school children would be caught in it.

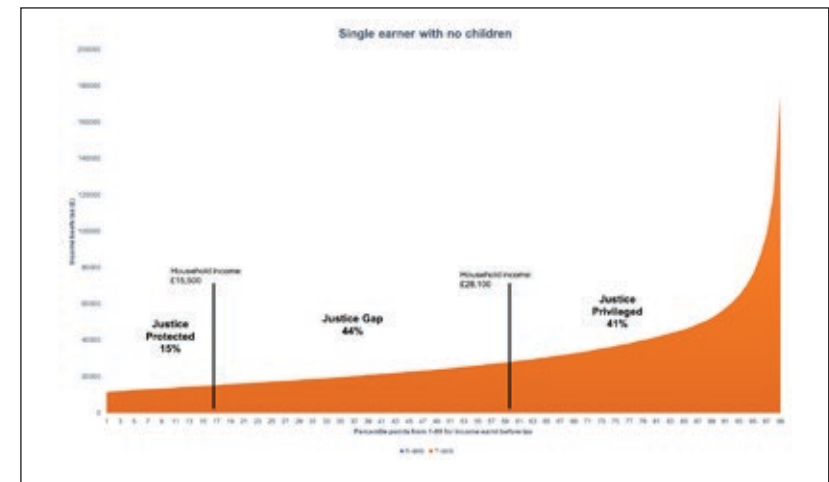
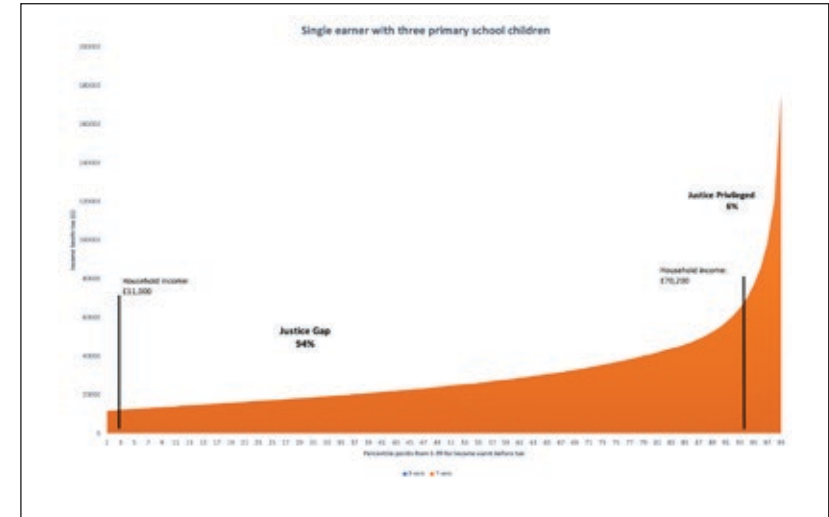
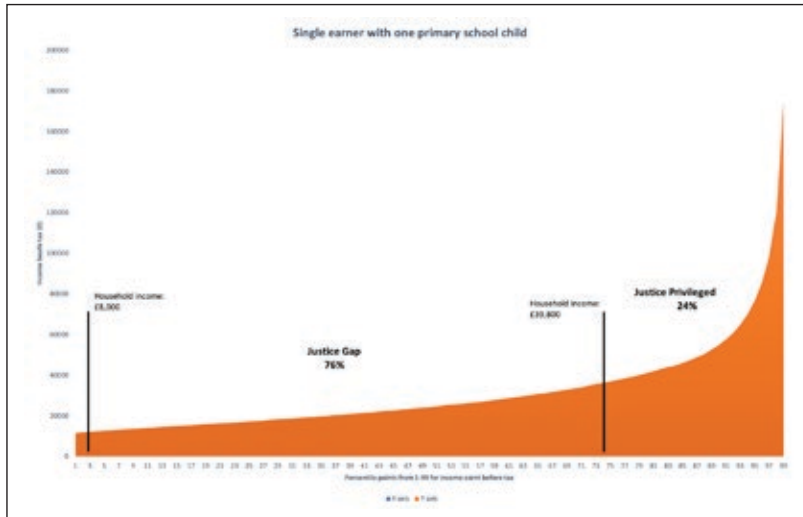
This can also be applied to couples. 18% of working parents with 3 children below the age of 4 would fall in the Justice Gap, because the maximum household earnings with which they would be able to access legal aid is £52,000. As their children get older the number falling in the Gap would increase, as their eligibility for legal aid drops. For example, 65% of working parents with two children in primary school and one child below the age of 4 would be locked out of accessing Justice.

**04** Again the more children a couple has, and the older they are, the larger the Justice Gap. 74% of working parents with 3 primary school children and one secondary school child would be caught in the Gap (below).

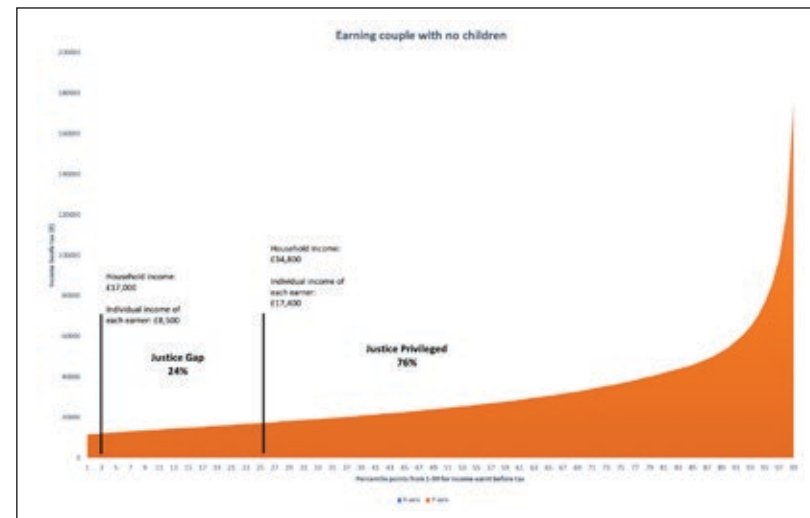
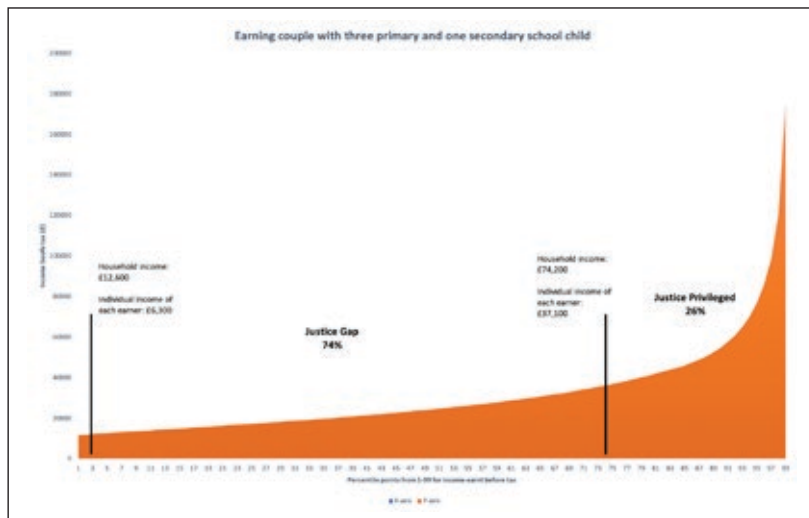
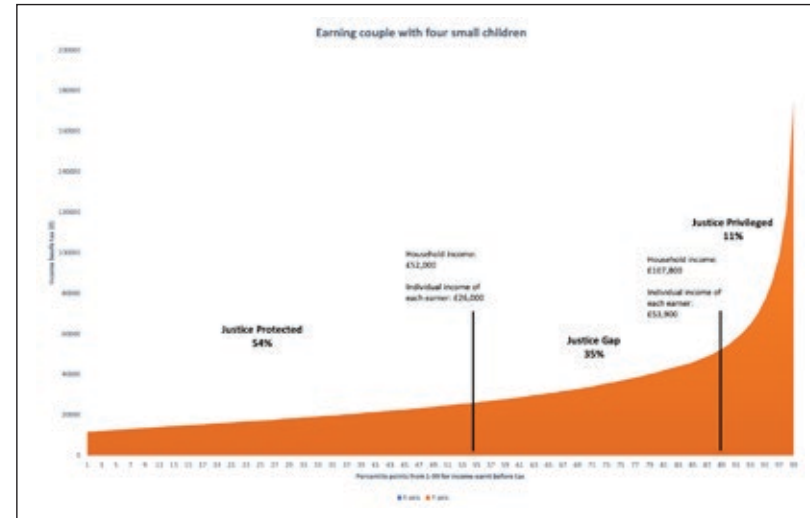
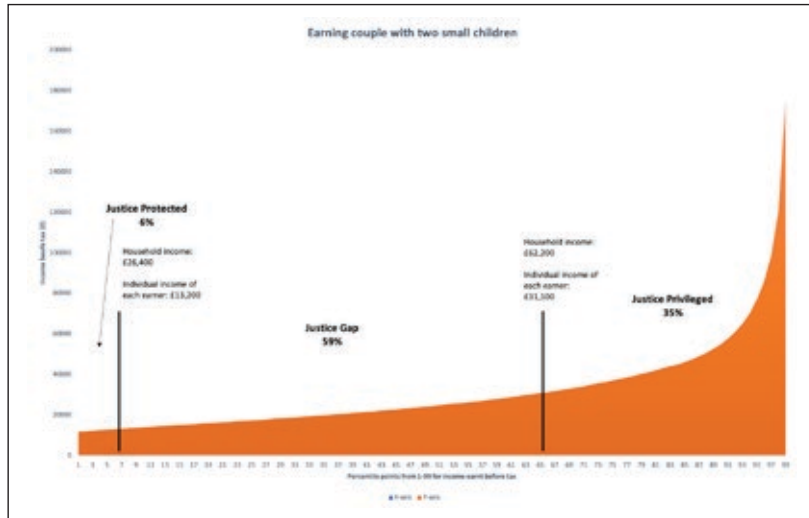
**05** While having multiple young children does increase the likelihood of couples receiving legal aid, this still leaves a 'squeezed middle' of couples with multiple young children. Couples with 4 infants would need yearly household income of below £52,000 or above £107,800 to avoid being caught in the Justice Gap (below).



## THE JUSTICE GAP



'Data on the percentile points on individual wage earners was taken from the Office of National Statistics' 'Percentile points from 1 to 99 for total income before and after tax' for the most recent period, '2017-2018'. Data can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/percentile-points-from-1-to-99-for-total-income-before-and-after-tax>.





## People in the Justice Gap

'Izzy', a recent graduate from the University of Cambridge, was also shocked to find herself caught in the Justice Gap: 'I hadn't really considered the fact that my income wouldn't afford me access to legal representation until now and it's definitely playing on my mind.'

She now works at an historic London concert venue. As a renter in London with no children, she is one of the 44% of single earners with no children who would have to choose between poverty or no legal protection should they need it.

**“Having been involved in an extensive court case as a child I've always understood how vital legal support is but I'd not realised that I am currently so unprotected. Everyone should have the right to protect themselves legally at their most vulnerable times.”**

## BEHIND THE CALCULATIONS

The evidence used for the calculations, detailed below, tend towards conservative estimations of average civil legal costs and rent payments. Therefore, the Justice Gap could include more people if a wider variety of core costs was considered.

- Information about relationship status and number of children is taken as the variable, because it is an important determinant of a number of aspects of budgeting for legal costs, such as eligibility for legal aid, average childcare costs, and average social rent.
- The default housing costs assume average social rent for a family with children, and otherwise modest private rent. For simplicity's sake this does not include regional variation, and thus rules out potentially much higher rent costs in London and the South East, in turn producing a more conservative Justice Gap for an individual or couple living in those areas. If further work is to be done on the Justice Gap, regional variation in housing costs would be taken into account, producing a varied but in some cases more extreme figure.
- The default childcare costs used assume nursery care for under 5s and after-school care for 5-11s. In some cases, additional allowable costs, such as child maintenance, could permit legal aid at higher earnings than shown by the calculator, but this would also require additional income to cover these costs, and thus produce a similar 'Justice Gap'.
- Average civil legal costs have been derived from the average annual government spend on a civil legal aid case. The National Statistic Office's most recent survey of legal aid expenditure published in March 2020 shows a total of 63,000 cases costing £186m over one year. This produces the conservative figure of £3,000. 6 months has been taken as the period of payment, on the basis that this is what is used as part of the criminal legal aid system in relation to maximum eligible fees.<sup>16</sup>
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Loughborough University measure the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) every year. It shows how much households need in a weekly budget and how much they need to earn in order to achieve this disposable income. Different levels of Minimum Income Standards are calculated for different types of people - e.g. single people, families, working people and pensioners.
- Population data used in the findings to work out percentages of earners who fall in the Justice Gap has been taken from HMRC.

## People in the Justice Gap

Gary Regis is a pub manager in Bristol, working in a sector heavily threatened by the impact of the pandemic. He and his partner have 4 children, at the ages of 11, 10, 8 and 4. To his shock, he is in the Justice Gap.

While Gary was aware of legal aid, the extent to which people across the country are threatened with poverty should they need legal representation is a surprise. It has made him realise that 'justice is more of a privilege (than a right) - you might actually not have the protections you take for granted'.

He is very worried that in 'the current climate, people don't have the resources to look after themselves legally against corporations'.

**“These are the rights we had five or ten years ago - why don't we have them now? What's changed?”**



## FILLING THE JUSTICE SINKHOLE

Law Centres must be supported if they are to meet the increasing demand for free legal advice and representation.

With many Centres dependent upon legal aid payments for funding, not only is their financial future in question, but so is their capacity to serve the millions of new clients who fall in the Justice Gap, and thus cannot access legal aid.

The Covid-19 crisis hit Law Centres hard. The closure of courts and thus the suspension of case-by-case legal aid payments meant the very survival of the movement was at times in doubt. An emergency appeal was launched to ensure it continued and, backed by generous donations from the legal sector as a whole and with an emergency £3million grant from the Ministry of Justice, closure was averted and the immediate cash flow gap was plugged.

Nevertheless, this was a wake up call not only for Law Centres but also the legal sector as a whole, as it exposed the precarity of relying on legal aid income. **The Ministry of Justice has seen cuts to its overall budget of 40% since 2010** - among the deepest of any government department.<sup>17</sup> **Spending on legal aid has shrunk by more than £600m in five years between 2011-2016.** These cuts, coupled with the challenges facing Law Centres' finances, highlights why since 2012 nearly twenty Law Centres have closed their doors for good.

### Law Centres funding in danger by the pandemic

As in March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic in the UK:

- **On average 26% of all Law Centre income is from legal aid**
- **42% of Law Centres recorded a deficit for the Year ending 2019**

As courts closed and some proceedings were suspended indefinitely:

- **54.5% of Law Centres had less than 3 months of reserve funding**
- **76% of Law Centres had less than 6 months of reserve funding**

Legal aid pays for much legal assistance that would otherwise not be funded. It enables Law Centres to go beyond giving advice and provide free representation on cases. However, legal aid fees are low and conditional, involve significant red tape and still leave many problem types without help. Making up over a quarter of Law Centres' income also suggests that they are too dependent upon it.

### Reliance on Government Funds

Law Centres across the country agree that in order to sustain the movement, an over reliance on ever-shrinking legal aid payments poses a grave risk.

The Director of Harrow Law Centre, Pamela Fitzpatrick, argues that 'people need to see that we're independent'. She points out that 'central government or political funding is not going to change, and Law Centres shouldn't be too reliant'. Government's lack of commitment to legal assistance cannot be attributed to one party only. While recent justice cuts have come under the Conservative government, the big legal aid cuts of 2013 were passed by the coalition government, and the Labour Party had promised cuts to legal aid in their 2010 manifesto.



## Case Study - 'One man and his dog'



However, Julie Ehlen, Director of Employment and Equality Law Centre, thinks that government funding can not be replaced entirely, while also recognising that greater funding is needed. She argued that the Ministry of Justice should increase funding for Law Centres, highlighting how 'if people get early intervention, it can prevent matters escalating massively', in turn saving tax-payers money down the line.

While there is a clear need that Law Centres protect themselves against cuts by reducing reliance on legal aid, government funding is not unnecessary or unwelcome. Law Centres deliver very impressive social return on investment, but more importantly have a transformative impact on their clients' lives, especially at a time of growing legal need. The government has a responsibility to support such work. However, in the wake of Covid-19, there needs to be fresh thinking about the future financial survival of Law Centres.

Ronald's chronic alcoholism meant that he couldn't organise his life to take his dog for walks, and so his social landlord wanted him evicted. Ronald was determined not to give up his dog. His little companion had helped him through the depression he'd suffered after his young son died. He couldn't cope with another loss.

Sue James's response at court was emblematic of the instinctive dedication Law Centres solicitors have to their clients.

Ronald, who had previously been a successful cameraman before his son's death, found the trial emotionally challenging.

**"He was banging his fists on his head and rocking back and forth. He bit his lip, blood streamed down his chin. By this time I was prepared to consider anything – so I offered to take the dog myself."**

"Counsel thought I had gone mad. I think I had. Luckily, I found a less dramatic solution by persuading Ronald's friend Anthony to take the dog."



# A Blueprint for Future Justice

On the 50th Anniversary of the first Centre's founding, the Law Centres Network is launching a new campaign 'Law For All' to seek to address this funding challenge. The campaign will aim to build up sustainable funding for Law Centres and publicise their work more effectively.

# 01

## Diversify Funding Streams

### Law Centres need to diversify their funding streams.

Over reliance on local or central government, which can either be prone to political change, or on short term grant payments that restrict Law Centres to certain projects, is not a long-term solution. Support from the corporate sector should also be sought.

Law For All seeks to achieve this diversity of income through creating a 'Justice Fund'. The Fund has already received over £100,000 in seed funding from UK law firms when the Covid-19 emergency hit in mid-March. It will now build on this by providing opportunities for firms to donate larger amounts to become 'Foundation Partners', and therefore receive greater recognition for their donations.

At least as important would be the support of the general public. Contributions would not only bolster Law Centres but serve as public backing for the principle of access to justice for all. While the Justice Fund would not be able to meet the current increase in legal need, it would become an endowment that would help plug the gap left by public funding cuts. This way it would help Law Centres rebuild their movement, and ensure that more people are able to access justice.

# 02

## Engage the legal community

### Law Centres must engage the legal community and draw on its resources and skills to sustain the movement in the future.

According to former Attorney General Baroness Scotland, pro bono is 'in the DNA' of every lawyer – part of a gut instinct that injustice should be rectified through the instrument of the law. Law Centres do rely on pro bono lawyers volunteering their time to help clients, but could develop its relations with legal professionals further.

Law For All is seeking to address this by creating a 'Justice Club'. Lawyers who have volunteered at early stages in their careers but have not been engaged consistently by Law Centres, will be encouraged to join a network of supporters. As Friends of Law Centres, their support might include:

- A monthly stream of donations that supporters can opt into.
- Wide-scale engagement in policy decisions, either through surveys or conferences, to discuss the best ways to ensure more people can access justice.
- Networking and social events to encourage more lawyers to take an interest in pro bono service provision.
- Better engagement in distinct fundraising events and challenges.

# 03

## Engage the public

### The public need to know what Law Centres are, and that they are there for people in need of specialist legal assistance

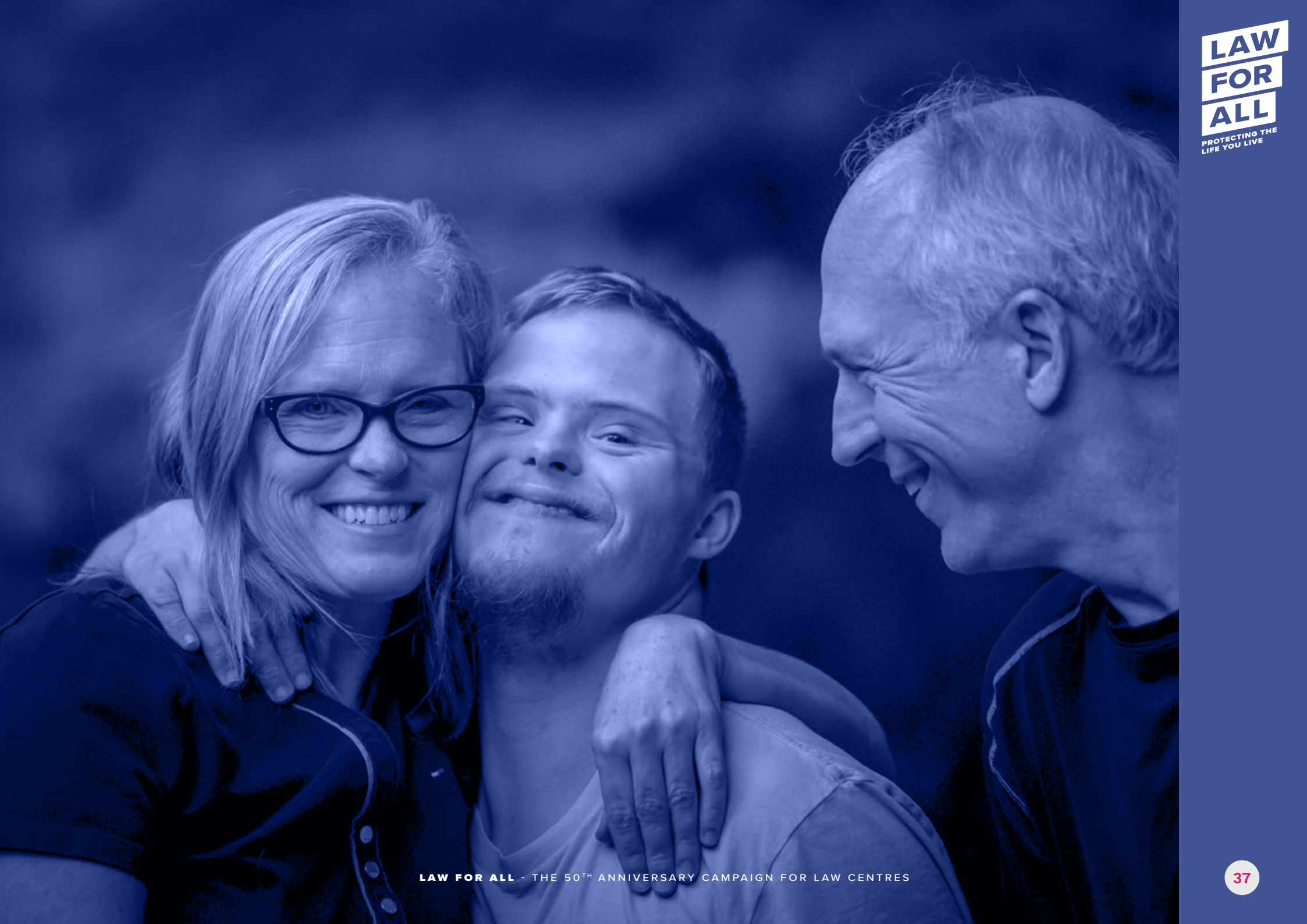
At present, public awareness of Law Centres' vital work does not correspond with its importance. This calls for a greater engagement so more and more people get to know Law Centres and support their services for the public good.

Public engagement also needs to emphasise that, for a large proportion of the population, legal fees are unaffordable, and legal aid does not cover them. As more people need legal assistance with job loss or the threat of eviction, people in the Justice Gap are having to choose: fall into poverty, or receive no legal protection.

The 'Law For All' campaign aims to raise not only financial support but awareness of Law Centres. The recent Covid-19 crisis demonstrated that both the legal sector and the Government recognised the importance of Law Centres and the need for its survival. Our challenge now is to ensure that the British public recognises this vital role, too.

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