

*Working in  
partnership  
to make a  
difference*

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## Who we are:

Like all Law Centres we defend the legal rights of people who cannot afford a lawyer. We are a team of specialists working in our community to uphold justice and advance equality. Set up in 1989, we are a charitable company and work as a peer led organisation with a Board of Trustees.

# Our Mission

*Our mission as a peer-led organisation is to increase access to justice for disadvantaged individuals and communities through the provision of quality assured, accessible, free and low-cost legal advice, 1-2-1 support services, information and representation to individuals and groups across our geographical area.*

## Our Values

### Respect

To treat everyone with integrity and respect.

To value and respect each other's expertise and diversity. To take responsibility for what we do and support each other to succeed.



### Create

To respond to changing needs. To be innovative and resourceful.



### Collaborate

To collaborate internally and externally. To listen and share. To work as a team using all of our expertise and skills together to get the best outcomes.



### Care

To promote personal wellbeing and to adopt safe and healthy working practices.



## Our Strategic Aims

### Clients and their needs

To provide a service that meets the needs of clients and is welcoming, nonjudgmental and accessible for all, including an accessible initial assessment and signposting service to all enquirers.

### Service delivery

To provide and increase the provision of quality assured specialist legal advice, assistance and representation in social welfare law, supported by the provision of wrap around support services.

### Visibility and presence

To extend awareness of the rights and remedies available to individuals and communities and the work of the Law Centre through user involvement, information, publicity and promotional work.

### Partnerships and collaboration

To continue to work in partnership with other organisations, both existing and new to identify need, enhance support for clients and maximise resources.

### Culture and people

To ensure that the Law Centre has well-trained and supported staff and volunteers to deliver high quality services, guided by a well-trained board of trustees, reflective of the community to ensure good governance.

### Financial sustainability

To increase and diversify the financial and other resources of the Law Centre to ensure its future sustainability.



# Welcome to our review of the year 2022 - 2023

## A year of working in partnership and making a difference

Thank you for taking the time to read our Annual Report. This year Derbyshire Law Centre has been heavily involved in forging new partnerships. Through these new partnerships we have been able to make a difference to the lives of many clients as well as developing some valuable working relationships.

New projects and partnerships have enabled us to support and represent some of the most deprived in our county in their struggles, allowing us to continue to meet our mission and increase access to justice for the disadvantaged.

I want to thank the staff for their hard work and commitment in delivering quality services that are continuing to be in ever increasing demand.

This year we have said goodbye to a number of our team. Their hard work over the years has helped us to deliver our objectives and enabled the foundations to be forged for new projects and partnerships.

We have also seen some changes to the Management Committee, following the district elections in May. We sadly also lost Cllr Roger Redfern who passed away after a long illness, and our condolences go to his family and friends.

Their commitment, hard work and loyalty to the Derbyshire Law Centre has been much appreciated and we will miss them.



**Jenny Flood**  
*Chair of the Management Committee*

We welcome new staff who have hit the ground running, providing a smooth transition and exciting new projects including delivering on our funding and volunteer objectives.

The continuing cost of living and energy crisis have put more pressure again on our services.

All this has challenged us to grow our Law Centre and to bring in additional funding. Now, collaborating with some new partners we are able to provide a more holistic approach and to see the resources making even more difference to our client's lives.

I would like to thank all our funders and donors for their continuing support, and as you will see from this Annual Report we have once again used our resources to make a difference.

We welcome the new trustees and look forward to working together.

As promised, the Trustees on the Management Board have been reviewing our Memorandum and Articles of Association and our Governance. We hope that this work will be considered at the 2024 AGM. Our aim is to ensure that the structure of the Management Board is fit for purpose in this changing environment and that it is able to support staff and volunteers to continue to deliver the high-quality services to the increasing numbers requiring our advice and help.

I want to thank all the Trustees and Members for their support and commitment to Derbyshire Law Centre this year.

And finally, as we look ahead, I want to commit us to continuing to work towards a Board that meets the diversity and equality we have identified is required, as well as forging more links with new partners to enable us to go on helping to make a difference to lives together.

**Thank you all,**

**Jenny**

# How we've made a difference

*- a report from our Senior Solicitor, Lisa Haythorne*

**Over the past year Derbyshire residents, like those across the UK, have faced rising costs for life's essentials. The social and economic impacts of the Cost of Living crisis have sent waves through our local communities and we are seeing an ever-increasing demand for legal support in all areas.**

Despite the rise in enquiries and cases at the Law Centre, we have continued to provide a service that I am exceptionally proud of, that has assisted thousands of people across the county.

We have built upon our existing projects in areas such as Homelessness Prevention and our Rapid Response Employment services and have strengthened ties with local authorities and community organisations to increase the number of projects we are delivering and the amount of people we can help.

Legal issues like eviction or discrimination at work rarely exist in isolation and where one problem exists there are often other elements that we can help



**Lisa Haythorne**  
*Senior Solicitor*

with. Our continued focus on building relationships with external agencies and authorities has meant that we have strengthened this holistic approach, helping us to receive referrals early so we can implement more effective intervention.

As well as dealing with a rising number of enquiries and cases we have dealt with some significant team changes internally. Two key changes have been the retirement of our outgoing Senior Solicitor Tony McIlveen and Employment Supervisor Ellen Taylor.

Tony was already a central figure at the Derbyshire Law Centre when I joined in 2006, having started 6 years previously. During his time here Tony drove long-lasting, meaningful change for clients and members of the team. He supervised and supported many of our finest Solicitors, Trainees and Case-workers and tirelessly advocated for better access to justice and the promotion of social welfare law. We wish Tony all the very best in his retirement.

My colleagues in Employment have written about Ellen's much missed presence in their unit, but speaking on behalf of the whole organisation we will all miss her reassuring support, wise words and calm guidance.

We have said sad goodbyes to other very valuable team members as they have moved on in their careers and we thank them for everything they did for the Law Centre. On the other hand, we have welcomed a cohort of new colleagues, both in the Legal and Coordination teams, who bring with them a wealth of knowledge, experience and enthusiasm. New funding this year has enabled us to employ caseworkers for key social law areas and has allowed us to develop our community engagement through outreach, communications and volunteer recruitment.

Maintaining strong partnerships and engagement is the key to building resilience in our local communities and this will continue to be our central focus as we look to the year ahead.

***Lisa Haythorne***

# How we've made a difference - our impact 2022 - 2023

During the period 1.9.2022 to 31.8.2023 we:

Advised on  
**5880 enquiries**

(up by 6.7% from last year)

Of these, **1334 enquiries** were about areas of law we don't deal with, signposting and referring these to other agencies.

21% of these enquiries were family related



Opened

**1325 cases**

(down by 8.9% from last year)

Secured  
**£380,691.54**



in employment related settlement agreements for cases closed during the period

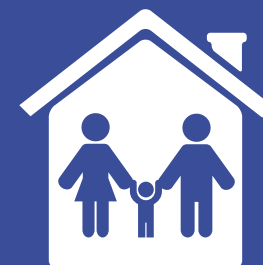
Improved the self-confidence and self-esteem of  
**84% of clients**



Supported

**657 people**

= 50% of all cases with housing problems, including preventing 197 people from being made homeless, saving local councils at least £985,000



Handled

**128 discrimination enquiries**

= 2% of all enquiries and opened 45 cases

Handled  
**1044 employment enquiries**

= 18% of all enquiries and opened 129 employment cases  
= 10% of all cases

Handled  
**458 immigration enquiries**

= 8% of all enquiries and opened 90 immigration cases = 7% of all cases

Handled  
**1917 housing enquiries**

= 33% of all enquiries

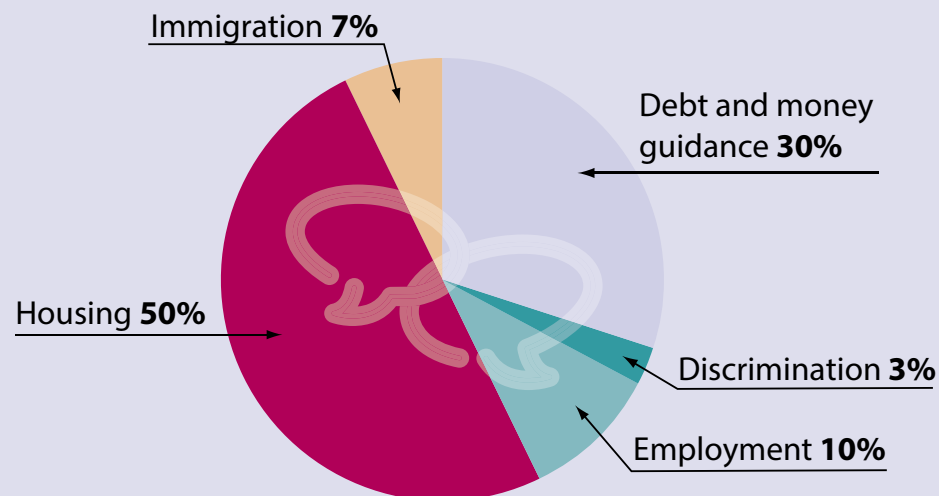
Handled

**999 debt enquiries**

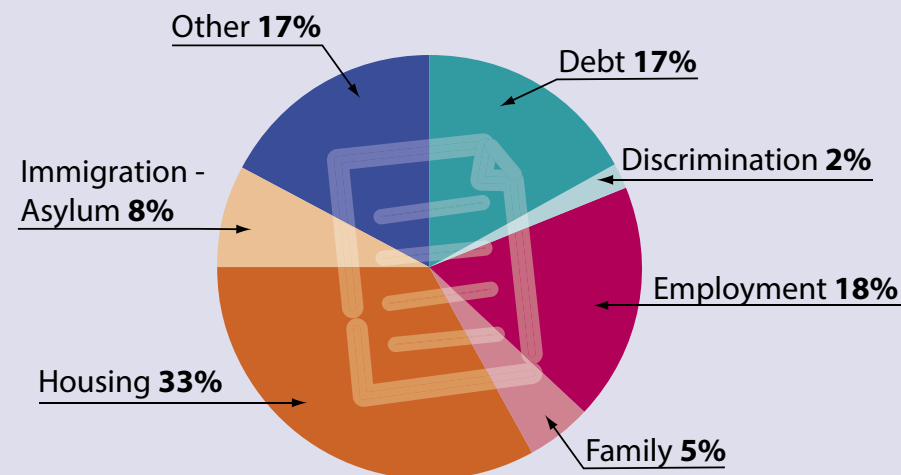
= 17% of all enquiries and opened 403 cases  
= 30% of all cases



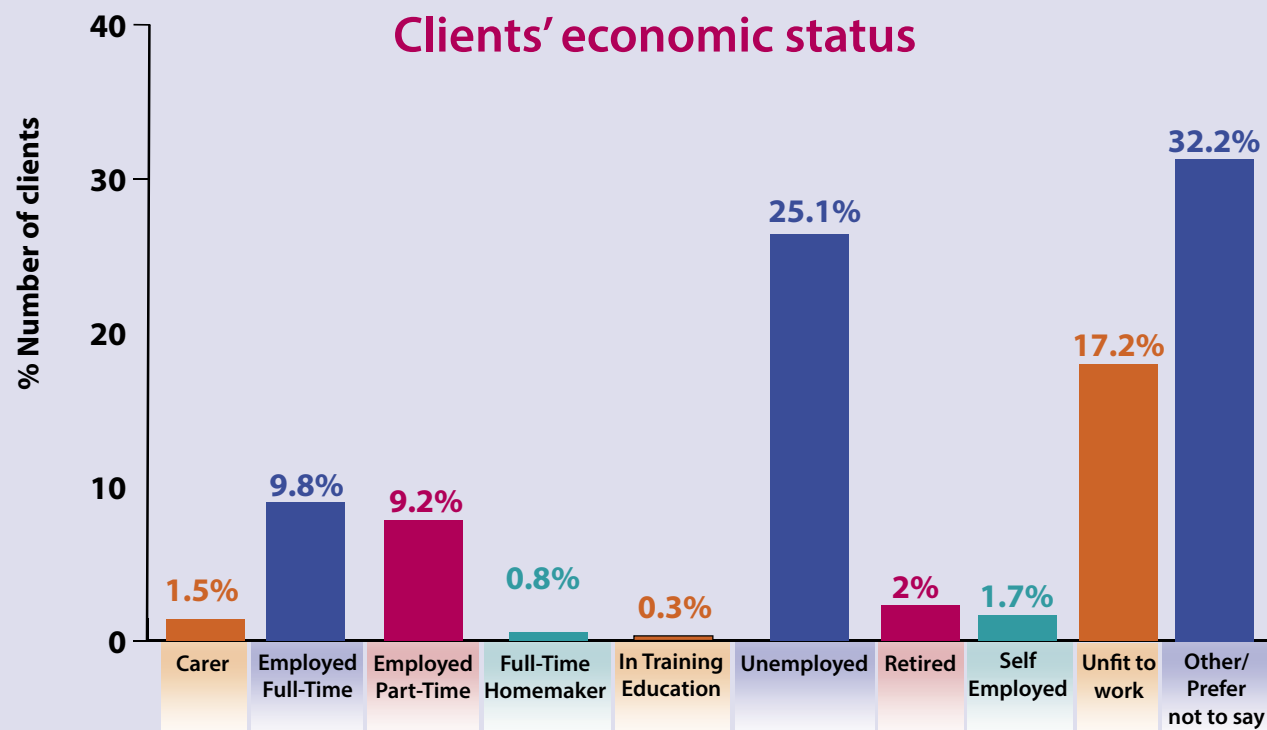
## Type of cases



## Type of enquiries



## Clients' economic status



# Making a difference for people in debt

The highlight of the year for the Debt Unit was the arrival of Oscar; Sally having started her maternity leave on 20 January, Oscar was born on the 27th, and has made frequent visits to DLC to say hallo to us all. We have also welcomed Kate to the Unit to cover Sally's post while she is on maternity leave, but are saying goodbye to Carmen, a valued member of the Law Centre, at the end of August. During the year we also hosted Patrick as a trainee solicitor, undertaking his penultimate training contract area of work and learning the ropes in the Debt Unit.



Debt Team with Baby Oscar

## Unprecedented demand for the service

Throughout 2022 and 2023, we have been dealing with an unprecedented demand for our service. Statistics show that there has been an unsurprising increase in the number of people coming to see us with 'negative budgets' which means less money coming in than their essential outgoings. As well as looking in to and explaining debt options to our clients, including writing off debt, or making affordable arrangements to reduce it, we also try and identify ways people can either save money, however small, or maybe claim benefits they might not have realised they were entitled to.

We have seen an increase in the number of people contacting us as they can no longer afford to pay their mortgage, and we welcome the government's new 'mortgage charter' which will hopefully go some way to reinforcing the duty of mortgage lenders to look in to sustainable and long term options for home owners who are struggling, including extending the original mortgage term, adding arrears to the mortgage debt, or converting the mortgage to interest only on a temporary basis. We are often surprised at homeowners not being aware of the ability to potentially claim Support for Mortgage Interest through Universal Credit.

*"Just to let you know I got the DRO approval email today thank you very much to you and your team for all the help you have given me it really is much appreciated thank you so much."*



## Raising awareness

In February Sue was interviewed as part of a Channel 4 News investigation into the mis-selling of IVAs (Individual Voluntary Arrangement), and the unscrupulous practice of third-party referral fees, which have since been scrapped, and our clients, Michael, and Catherine Mason (see page 26) were also interviewed at length about their stressful experience of an inappropriate IVA.

## Funding cuts

The pressures facing debt advisors across the country continue, following a drastic cut to funding for community-based debt advice. Undeterred, in the face of an increased demand for free, unbiased and quality assured advice, we are working collaboratively with our partners in East Midlands Money Advice to try and strengthen partnership links with a view to being able to mount a strong bid in the future re-commissioning of current debt advice funding, planned by the Money and Pensions Service for April 2025.

## Providing holistic support

One of the strengths of the debt advice service offered by the Law Centre is our ability to offer a holistic service, with access to in-house specialist housing, employment, and immigration advice for our clients. We see so many people in crisis who have not been able to work out a plan to deal with their debt, often at the expense of their mental health. We never judge anyone, we look for solutions, and work on the basis there is always something we can do to make a difference, however small.

## Case study - Monica's story

*Monica was referred to us through the Help is Here scheme; our partners in that scheme, the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre in Shirebrook.*

*Marcin and Joanna provided one to one translation for Monica whose first language was Polish. Monica was struggling and very depressed following a breakdown in her relationship, which had left her struggling, and without any money to live on. Thanks to a combined effort from the DUWC (Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre), plus the debt, housing and homeless prevention teams at the Law Centre, Monica's circumstances over the course of 6 months were dramatically improved in the following ways:*

- We made sure that the unaffordable IVA Monica was in was properly ended.*
- We put Monica in Breathing Space to prevent urgent bailiff action, and to give her some time to think about the various ways of dealing with her debts.*
- Monica was helped by the DUWC to claim her full Universal Credit entitlement, and claim council tax support to reduce her bill.*
- We contacted the magistrates court and arranged for Monica's court fine to come directly out of her Universal Credit, to make sure it was regularly paid.*
- Monica was prevented from being evicted through representation at court by one of our specialist housing solicitors.*
- A plan was worked out for Monica so she could afford to pay her essential outgoings going forward.*
- Monica's debts were eventually written off through a Debt Relief Order to give her a fresh start and ensure she could prioritise rent, council tax and other essentials in the future.*
- We were able to cover the DRO fee payable to the Insolvency Service through a referral into our homelessness prevention project.*

## Kate Morgan joins the team

After 18 months as a Homelessness Prevention Paralegal, I joined the Debt Unit in January 2023. I had shared clients with the Debt Team before and mostly helped with grant applications for energy, water and council tax arrears. Taking on cases has been a challenge, especially with the constant flow of clients, but I am proud that we can take on the majority of clients as casework. I enjoy working with the Housing Unit to prevent evictions using the Breathing Space Scheme – clients use this time to get advice on all of their debts including rent and mortgage arrears.

I am mid-way through the Legal Practice Course, as I aim to be a solicitor eventually, and am enjoying studying alongside working in the Debt Unit.

Sue has guided me through the world of debt, teaching me my 'penalty charge notices' from my 'parking charge notices'!



Kate Morgan in the Debt Team

*"Thank u so much for helping me,  
I can breathe now and start a fresh."*

*"Thank u so much sue for giving me  
another chance in life just need to sort  
my mental health out now thank u."*



**693** clients helped

*Between 1 September 2022 and 31 August 2023*

# Making a difference for people facing discrimination

We continue to hold a legal aid contract in discrimination. This allows us to provide specialist advice and representation in employment, housing and access to goods and services. We now have 3 solicitors who deal with discrimination work, increasing the amount of people we can help. In the last year we have provided 2 discrimination call backs per day and 2 face to face slots per week.

As well as helping clients through legal aid we have also been successful in bidding for funding from The Barings Foundation. This funding, which is for 3 years, will be used to recruit a community outreach worker whose primary role will be to work with individuals, community groups and organisations to increase education and engagement about Discrimination and raise awareness of Derbyshire Law Centre's role as a legal advice hub within the county.

Due to the recruitment of Millie Barlow, our new Communications Worker we have been able to launch and become involved in several campaigns to effect social change and improve the lives of the people of Derbyshire including the campaign to keep rail ticket offices open. See page 26 for details.

Due to the nature of the work, we are unable to promote the successes we have due to the inclusion of confidentiality clauses in the agreements we enter to settle claims. However, below is a case study of an ongoing case which demonstrates our dedication to tackling discrimination in both a legal and a holistic approach.

## Case study - Shaun's story

*Shaun is a 13-year-old boy who due to an accident fractured his pelvis, he is confined to a wheelchair for the foreseeable future to allow the fracture to heal. Shaun went on holiday with his parents and sibling and wanted to enjoy the fair rides like his sibling, however when his mum asked if there was disabled access to the rides, she was told there was not meaning he could not act as any other 13-year-old would and enjoy the fair.*

*Shaun contacted Derbyshire Law Centre for advice. Shaun was advised that he met the definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 and that the fair has discriminated against him by failing to make reasonable adjustment to enable him to access the rides. As Shaun and his family went on other holidays and day trips as well as trying to access normal everyday services, they noticed that being disabled in 2023 was difficult and many providers of goods and services did not ensure that they were accessible to disabled people.*

*The litigation is still ongoing but Shaun, his family and Derbyshire Law Centre are confident that the outcome will be beneficial to Shaun who wanted to be able to do things and live his life like any other 13-year-old.*



**128**  
**Enquiries**

(up by 52 = up by 68.4%)



**45**  
**Cases dealt with**

(up by 30 = up by 200%)

# Making a difference for workers

**It has been another busy and productive year for the Employment Unit. Alongside rising enquiries and cases we have experienced key internal changes in our team.**

A huge change for us was the retirement of Ellen Taylor, who officially retired in June 2023. Ellen worked at the Law Centre for almost 20 years, starting as an Employment Advice Worker in 2004 and progressing to the Area of Law Supervisor in Employment & Discrimination. Ellen remained conscientious about the future, with succession and futureproofing always at the forefront of her mind. As such, Ellen selflessly delayed her retirement until Patrick Macken's return to the Unit, ensuring a smooth handover and transition.

Whilst Ellen's departure and retirement came as no surprise, her experience, knowledge, and resolve will be missed. DLC remains grateful for Ellen's long and diligent service and fundamental contribution toward the ongoing succession of the Unit.

Accordingly, and as planned, Patrick Macken returned to the Employment Unit as a newly qualified Solicitor and effectively took over from Ellen Taylor upon her retirement and has been appointed as the Employment Unit Supervisor and Area of Law Supervisor in Discrimination.

We have celebrated the qualification of not one but two Solicitors within the unit in 2023 and are proud to say that Gary Steel has also qualified as an Employment and Discrimination Solicitor. Gary is an experienced caseworker as well as a dedicated advocate of legal aid.

Throughout the last year we also appointed Gemma Grant as a Caseworker, as a locum for Patrick Macken, to ensure continuity of our essential services in his secondment from August 2022 to June 2023. Gemma was a passionate and hard-working member of the unit for the time she was with us and we wish her the best in her future endeavours.

The Employment Unit as it is now, stands proudly on the shoulders of the giants that preceded them. We believe that the unit will no doubt continue to flourish and always drive to maintain the standards and diligence of Ellen and our other predecessors in delivering essential employment services to the residents of Derbyshire.

Examples of the advice and support we have provided are highlighted in the following case studies:

## Case study - Emily's story

*Emily was employed as a warehouse operative for a supermarket, for 4 years. Her contractual hours were 10am – 6pm. Emily also regularly worked overtime after 6pm, payable at time and a half. She raised an issue with her wages and felt that some of her overtime had not been included – she was told to discuss this with her manager. Emily's concerns were shrugged off, and her manager suggested that she must have been mistaken. Emily then said that if she was not going to be paid properly for overtime, then there was no point in her working beyond 6pm in the future.*

*She received a letter confirming that her employment had terminated due to her resignation. Emily was upset and bewildered, but ultimately felt that any further attempts to change her manager's mind would be futile.*

*We advised resignation is only valid if it is communicated clearly & unambiguously and that an 'assumed' resignation is, for all intents & purposes, actually a dismissal.*

*We assisted in the submission of Emily's claim of Unfair Dismissal to the Employment Tribunal and acted as her representative throughout the duration of the proceedings. Ultimately, the parties arrived at a legally binding agreement, which entitled Emily to both compensation and re-engagement with the Company. Emily was delighted with the outcome.*



## Case study - Oscar's story

Oscar worked as an assistant in a Pharmacy. Shortly after he started work, Oscar believed that he was instructed to be complicit in what he believed to amount to fraud and misappropriation of company funds. Oscar challenged this instruction and raised it to his manager. A week later, Oscar was informed that his role as an assistant with the Company was at risk of redundancy and the following week, Oscar was dismissed as redundant. Because he was not employed for 2 years, he was not entitled to redundancy pay, or able to challenge the fairness of the redundancy dismissal.

We advised that certain dismissals, known as 'automatically unfair dismissals' are exempt from the 2-year service requirement. In Oscar's case, we advised that his concerns may have amounted to 'protected disclosures' (commonly known as 'whistleblowing') and that whilst he was ostensibly dismissed on the grounds of redundancy, the real reason may have been due to whistleblowing.

We advised that Oscar had merit in a case of automatic unfair dismissal due to the fact that Oscar was the only assistant who was consulted about redundancy, despite there being 4 others who should have also been consulted and the employer advertised for assistant roles shortly after he was dismissed. We assisted Oscar in surmising his potential claim to the employer, and successfully secured Oscar a compensatory sum.

*"Patrick went over and beyond to help me, and I am very grateful to him. He is a great asset to your team...keep up the brilliant work."*

*"Thank you so much. Couldn't have done it without you."*



Our employment and immigration team pictured from left to right, Tom, Sagar, Patrick and Gary.

# The Employment Advice Rapid Referral Service (EARRS)

Starting in 2022, the EARRS project provides specialist employment advice for clients with pre-existing health conditions. We aim to provide advice within 24-48 hours of us receiving a referral. Referrals can either be directly from a client themselves or from one of our referral partners.

The aim of the project is to provide specialist employment law advice early enough to reduce the stress and anxiety that the uncertainty of employment can bring. With our assistance, clients find that their issues are often addressed early enough to preserve and/or repair the employment relationship. Where this isn't possible, we can provide further advice and representation through alternative funding pathways.

This year we have particularly focused on expanding our network of referring agencies. This raised awareness of the Law Centre and helped more people access our services. The funding from Derbyshire Public Health will end at the end of this year, and we are actively looking for future funding to continue this important and beneficial work.



## Case study - James' story

*James was referred to us via the EARRS service. He was feeling bullied at work and felt the matter was being brushed under the carpet. It was having a significant impact on his mental health. We explained his options and suggested that he could submit a grievance to raise these issues with his employer.*

*We explained what to expect from the process and what to include in the grievance letter. James submitted this letter to his employer and after going through the grievance process his employer addressed the issue and took action against the individual concerned. James was pleased with this outcome, particularly as he was not aware of the grievance process until speaking with us. He was relieved the matter had finally been addressed by his employer.*

## Case study - Sarah's story

*Sarah was referred to us via the EARRS service. She had suffered an injury at work and was now off work for the foreseeable future. In a welfare meeting a manager had mentioned the possibility of beginning capability dismissal proceedings.*

*Hearing this had frightened Sarah who did not want to lose her job. During a call with a specialist employment advisor, we explained the basics of capability dismissal to Sarah, including occupational health assessment and potential reasonable adjustments, the usual timelines and what to expect. We also recommended that she speak to a personal injury specialist regarding her injury at work. Sarah said she felt much better after talking to us, and felt she now knew what to expect.*

# Working in partnership: Employment and Immigration - HALS funding (Help Accessing Legal Support)

**Last year we reported on the Legal Support for Litigants in Person (LSLIP) project which came to an end in 2022. We were fortunate to secure funding to continue this work through the Access to Justice Foundation's 'Help Accessing Legal Support (HALS)' project, which allowed this vital work to continue until June 2023. We are currently seeking funding to continue this work into 2024.**

The HALS project began in October 2022 and finished in June 2023. It was funded by the Access to Justice Foundation to provide specialist employment and immigration advice to residents of Derbyshire. It advised on issues that often fell outside the scope of legal aid.

With funding we ensured that the diagnostic assessment service, staffed by volunteers supervised by paid staff, continued to provide a triage service accessed by phone, text, email, post or in person and aims to assess all clients within 24 hours of initial contact.

Assessors are trained to identify and provide clarity around deadlines, particularly those with deadlines set by employers, employment and/or immigration tribunals, and the Home Office, prioritising them to ensure clients receive timely specialist legal advice and support to gather appropriate evidence, complete forms, and prepare for court.

By providing a triage service we empowered people to resolve issues themselves where possible, but also ensured we provided a fast-track service to those with more complex problems. Specialist initial advice was provided after a detailed assessment from an employment or immigration specialist - by phone, in person or virtual as required by client.

Initial specialist advice was provided in all areas of employment law, and all areas of immigration law, except asylum, work and student related applications. Where appropriate, clients may also have received an internal referral to one of the other specialist services, or signpost to self-help information.

More complex problems were referred to our full casework services. In employment, we undertook casework up to the point of issuing a claim at the Employment Tribunal: this included advice on grievances and disciplinary procedures; negotiating with employers, representing clients in early conciliation with ACAS and reaching settlement if possible; drafting and submitting claims to the Employment Tribunal.

All employment law issues were covered including: unpaid wages, notice and holiday pay; unfair dismissal; redundancy; agency work, fixed term and zero hours contracts; TUPE transfers; discrimination.

As we are accredited with the OISC to provide immigration and asylum advice and casework to level 3 (including appeals), we particularly sought to advise and support those with family based applications, and those who needed to regularise or extend their immigration status in the UK using Article 8 Human Rights arguments. We provided in-depth advice to clients, offering detailed guidance on the law, providing a written guide to the relevant application process including links to forms and guidance.

Where court action was unavoidable, we worked with clients in employment and immigration to prepare. We sought to support less vulnerable clients with self-representation but provided representation where appropriate for the most vulnerable clients in employment matters.

The funding allowed us to continue the close working partnerships built through previous funding with Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre, Shirebrook, and St James Centre in Derby City. Both organisations provide outreach in immigration for EU citizens, whose first language is not English. St James Centre also focuses support on the Roma community.

We worked with the Elm Foundation and other domestic violence support agencies to enable service users whose status in the UK relies on an abusive partner are able to regularise their status. For employment, referral agencies included Citizens Advice, Derbyshire Unemployed groups and MPs.

Workers' Centre, health practitioners, the DWP, Local Authorities, homelessness support groups and MPs.

**Between the 1st October 2022 and 30th June 2023 we have:**



**Handled  
497  
enquiries**



**Dealt with 18 cases**  
*(this includes a full casework  
service up to tribunal)*



**Provided 69 clients  
with specialist advice**  
*(this includes giving advice and a  
supporting letter)*

## Case study - Jen's story

*Jen (40) came to the UK in early 2023 as the spouse of a British Citizen. Soon after arriving in the UK, she became the victim of partner-based domestic abuse. She has 2 grown children from a previous marriage who live in the UK. She visited her daughter over the Easter Break which enraged her husband. Jen feared returning home and contacted the police. Derbyshire Police issued bail conditions to prevent her husband from harming Jen any further.*

*Jen was entirely reliant upon her husband and was the victim of financial abuse. He ended their tenancy and she had only 2 weeks before she had to leave her property and she had no means of supporting herself. She came through the DLC assessments team to the Immigration Unit and Homelessness Prevention Team.*

*The Immigration Unit acted urgently given the circumstances. Within 2 days they assisted her with applying for a Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) that would allow her to get a new visa, not reliant on her husband, and give her access to benefits so that a women's refuge or local authority could house her. They also provided her with food bank vouchers.*

*A week later she was granted the DDVC. The Immigration Unit in the next 3 months prepared an application for Settlement as a Victim of Domestic Violence providing evidence of the abuse and of the relationship. Jen is now recovering from her traumatic experiences and working as a carer in the Derbyshire Area.*



# Making a difference for migrants and their families

**The Immigration Unit has had another busy year and seen some changes in key staff.**

With the loss of both Tony Mcilveen, who officially retired in April 2023 and Beth Holt, who left in January 2023 it has been all change in the unit. Like many Law Centres we faced challenges in recruiting to fill these vacancies, due to the shortage of social welfare lawyers. But we are delighted that Sagar Shah joined us in April 2023, followed in July by Mae Elsmore-Renshaw. Sagar is an experienced immigration solicitor and joins us as a Senior Immigration Specialist. The new team are enabling us to continue to deliver a much-needed service and continue the great work provided by Tony and Beth.

We continue to provide immigration support via our twice-weekly call back service, as well as a charged casework service for non-project funded casework.

## AB Charitable Trust

Our funding from the AB Charitable trust has helped us to support women who have had to flee domestic violence and get them long term residence in the UK. Partners of British Citizens and settled individuals that come to the UK on spouse visas are dependent upon their relationship with their British or settled husband/wife continuing in order to stay in the UK, renew their status, and to eventually settle in the UK. This means that many victims of domestic violence who rely on a spouse visa to be in the UK often feel like they do not have the option to escape an abusive or violent relationship for fear of losing their rights to stay in the country. We have worked closely with the Elm Foundation as well as other domestic abuse charities and refuges in the county to take on these applications at no cost, assisted by the funding from AB Charitable Trust. This funding is until March 2025.



**7**  
**Enquiries**



**6**  
**Cases**

## Case study - Angela's story

*Angela is a Nigerian national and single mother of a British Child. She was a victim of domestic violence but did not qualify for Settlement as a victim of domestic violence. She was instead granted a family visa that was due to expire in June 2023. She needed to apply to renew this visa but the application fee and immigration health surcharge in total were over £3000. She was unable to afford this and approached the law centre for assistance.*

*The Immigration Unit assisted Angela with a Fee Waiver Application which was granted after a few months and then helped her submitting the Family Visa application. Angela currently awaits a decision but reports that she and her children are doing well and integrating well in the UK.*

*"I would like to express my sincere gratefulness for handling my case with outmost professional manner. You have stuck by me throughout these few months dealing with my stressful case with outmost composure, ethical and excellent representation. Most importantly, I am grateful for listening to me. Please keep up the good work in service for those in need and awareness in campaigning for justice."*

## EUSS Project

Another year has passed since Brexit, yet EU citizens continue to require the support of the Law Centre in understanding their rights and applying to regularise their stay in the UK.

The Law Centre first entered into a joint project with the Law Centres Network (LCN) to inform EU citizens on their rights and entitlements whilst living and working in the UK. This project evolved into the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) project in May 2019 funded by the Home Office. This funding was used by the Law Centre to assist individuals applying to the EUSS.

The Law Centre delivered this project to individuals who sought our assistance but also on an outreach basis at St James Centre in Derby and Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre in Shirebrook.

The EUSS Home Office project ended on 30 June 2023.

This project ended as the funding ended, but the work is far from done. The Law Centre has had to pivot to continue supporting EU Nationals with the EUSS. This leads us to talk about the Justice Together Initiative Project.

### Case study - Mona's story

*Mona is a Spanish national with pre-settled status in the UK. She has applied to convert this to settled status which would let her stay in the UK indefinitely but has been refused on multiple occasions as she was unable to provide that she was continuously resident in the UK for 5 years.*

*Mona approached DLC for assistance through our assessments team. Using the EUSS funding we were able to prepare a fresh application for her and assess her evidence to ensure that 5 years' worth of evidence was available and in doing so ensure a positive decision.*

*"This business is amazing! They helped me with my fiancé's visa and now we are happily living in the UK as a family."*

Between 1st September 2022 and 30th June 2023 we have:



Handled  
**118**  
enquiries



Opened  
**57**  
cases

## Justice Together Initiative (JTI)

The Law Centre in collaboration with Community Advice and Law Service (in Leicester) and other Legal Advice Charities entered into a joint bid for a grant from JTI to increase the number of immigration advisers in the East Midlands. To achieve this, we are in conversations with local advice charities who support migrants to provide supervision, training and support to become accredited immigration advisors. We have been granted special agreement from the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) to allow these fresh-faced advisors to undertake immigration casework to gain experience to OISC competence.

This project will enable us to continue our EUSS work that might otherwise have ended.

The project has only just started so watch this space.

## Case study - Andy's story

*Andy is a Polish national who came to the UK back in 2016 as a minor but then had to leave to care for his terminally ill father from 2019 to 2022, therefore being unable to apply in his own right to the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS). His father passed in 2022 and he was placed in the guardianship of his elder sister who is Settled in the UK. Andy has no other family left in Poland.*

*Andy came to the UK at the end of 2022 and applied to the EUSS, he was refused on the basis that he lacked evidence.*

*Andy came to an outreach session held by the Immigration Unit with his sister where it was determined that Andy would be eligible to apply for EUSS based on his sister's Settled Status. The Immigration Unit assisted Andy in obtaining evidence such as guardianship orders, proof of his father's illness and passing. Andy's application is currently with the Home Office awaiting a decision, but we are hopeful of them reaching a positive decision.*

Between 1st April 2023 and 30th August 2023 we have:



**Handled**  
**30**  
**enquiries**



**Opened**  
**20**  
**cases**

## Other partnership work

In partnership with Derbyshire County Council, Derbyshire Law Centre has been assisting those in Derbyshire under the Syrian Resettlement Scheme apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain and British Citizenship. This is vital for them to remain in the UK where they are safe and where they have now made their home.

Derbyshire Law Centre's immigration unit also provides an outreach clinic at DUWC's Shirebrook office under a grant known as Help is Here. We have been able to assist several clients apply to the European Union Settlement Scheme either to regularise their stay in the UK or help them towards Settled Status in the UK. Lack of status means that people are unable to access benefits, unable to work and unable to study. These restrictions can have a terrible impact on their wellbeing. These types of outreach services help to ensure that people are not overlooked or ending with undue hardship.

## New LAA contract awarded

We are proud to announce that we have obtained a legal aid contract for Immigration which started on 1 September 2023. We are in the process of training staff in legal aid work, informing stakeholders and hope to help those particularly vulnerable such as asylum-seeking minors, victims of domestic violence and victims of modern slavery.

*"The excellent services provided by the Chesterfield Law Centre helped me to obtain my British citizenship. The whole process has been dealt with professionalism, efficiency and sound guidance"*

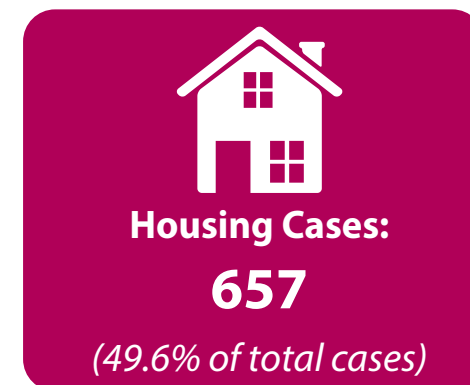
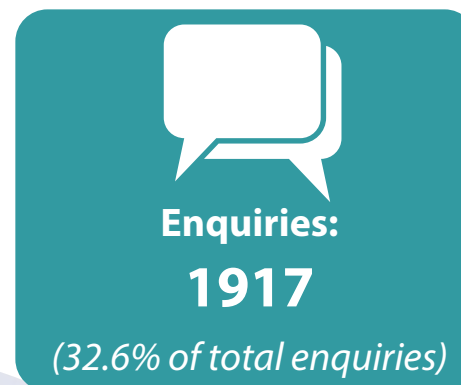
# Making a difference for those with housing problems

In the last year the Housing Unit have seen the effects of the current cost of living increases, resulting in an increase, resulting in an increase in both enquiries and cases for the Unit. Private landlords appear to be seeking possession, either because they no longer want to be landlords due to the forthcoming changes to the S21 process, or so that they can increase the rent on their properties. We have also had many enquiries from clients who have been presented with rent increases, including clients from full blocks of flats where the charges have increased vastly.

Illegal evictions have continued, and these are the cases that we often must fit in as emergencies. These cases create a lot of work for the whole team. The team are experts and great at pulling everything together to get these cases in to court to obtain an injunction for the tenant to be able to return to their property. Being viewed as specialists by the courts and having a good working relationship with court staff really helps in these cases.

The partnerships we have with our local authorities are extraordinary. These positive relationships, of which we are immensely proud, enable us to work together to achieve better outcomes for clients.

In addition to our core service funded by Bolsover District Council, Chesterfield Borough Council, Derbyshire County Council and North East Derbyshire District Council, and our Legal Aid contract which has been extended until August 24 we are grateful to other funding which allows us to offer even more services and deliver projects to enable us to help and advise more residents in Derbyshire of their housing rights.



## Chesterfield Housing Possession Court Desk Scheme

Over the last 12 months, the Law Centre has continued to provide representation to tenants and homeowners who face possession proceedings at Chesterfield County Court. The service is funded by the Legal Aid Agency, with additional supported funding from our local authorities, with the Law Centre holding a contract since its inception in 2005. The service ensures that a housing solicitor is on hand on every day that a possession claim is due to be heard, typically every Tuesday, to provide advice and representation to those that need it.

As of 1 August 2023, the duty contract has been renamed by the Legal Aid Agency to Housing Loss Prevention Advice Services (HLPAS). Under this new contract, the Law Centre can provide early intervention legal advice, including on welfare benefits issues, prior to any possession hearing.

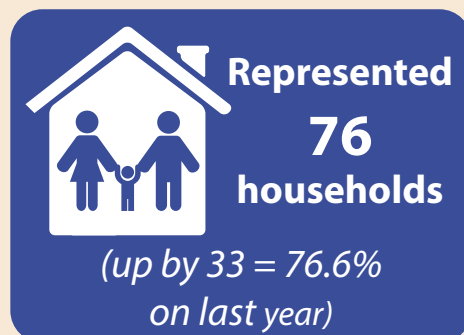
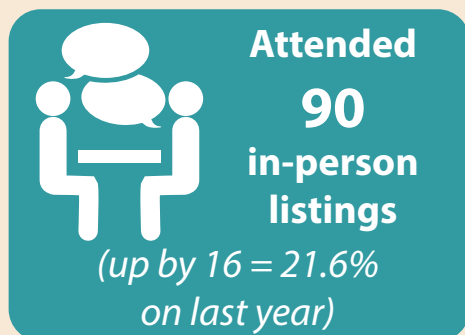


There continues to be no financial eligibility criteria for representation, so we can provide advice to all tenants and homeowners facing mortgage repossession at Court. The continued holistic approach that the Law Centre can offer with advice for debt and employment matters, coupled with the continuation of our Homeless Prevention Project, can help with negotiations with landlords to adjourn cases whilst we work to rectify issues households are facing.

Possession cases have risen in the last 12 months with those in North Derbyshire suffering from the increase in the cost of living which has led to proceedings being taken by landlords for rent arrears.

With consistent increases to interest rates brought in by the Bank of England so far in 2023, mortgage repossession cases are also increasing due to those on variable rates seeing their contractual monthly instalments rising dramatically. With further uncertainty for the remainder of 2023 and for 2024, and despite several lenders signing up to the mortgage charter, we expect more mortgage repossession cases in the coming months.

The Law Centre also continues to see an increase in cases whereby private landlords are relying upon Section 21 notices to regain possession of properties. These cases are driven by two factors; the first being an increase to mortgage rates and the second being due to Government proposals to scrap this process entirely through the Renters (Reform) Bill which was introduced to Parliament in May 2023. It is not known at this time when this bill could be passed into law.



## Local Authority Caseworker Projects

Thanks to funding from these local authorities, the Law Centre can provide legal and holistic housing advice to the residents of Amber Valley, Erewash and North East Derbyshire. We are able to provide initial advice to all, and specialist casework is available to those who qualify for legal aid. Having a dedicated caseworker means that the Law Centre can work closely with the local authority and the residents to provide the best outcomes for residents who are threatened with homelessness. We offer a full range of advice on possession, disrepair, homelessness, unlawful eviction, and harassment.

### Amber Valley Caseworker Project

Thanks to continued funding the Law Centre provides a full-time housing caseworker and one part time housing solicitor to provide legal and holistic housing advice to the residents of Amber Valley. An in-person presence at Ripley Town Hall means that the Law Centre can provide urgent advice when needed.

This project also works closely with our Homelessness Prevention Project which employs a full-time homelessness prevention paralegal for Amber Valley, able to support households to secure or maintain accommodation. By working together, we can provide early advice and intervention to resolve issues before they lead to homelessness.



## Erewash Caseworker Project

In December 2022 we were incredibly pleased to have been awarded funding by Erewash Borough Council to start a housing caseworker project with them, building on the success of the project in Amber Valley.

The project funds a 3-day caseworker post for a year. The post has very quickly become established, and the work has been challenging. There have been several unlawful evictions that we have had to issue proceedings on and obtain injunctions for clients to return to their homes. There has been a real issue with supported housing providers evicting clients without the proper notice period or form. We hope in Erewash to not only take these matters to court but to educate the landlords which ultimately will bring a better quality of accommodation to clients and more security.

We have very quickly established a good relationship with Erewash who have provided us with some complicated questions to answer! It is exciting for us as a team to start a project in a new area and to get to know the local landlords.



## North East Derbyshire Caseworker Project

In December 2022 we were also incredibly pleased to have been awarded funding by North East Derbyshire District Council to start a housing caseworker project with them increasing our local authority caseworker housing projects to 3. This project funds a qualified solicitor for 2 days per week and runs until December 2024.



### Case study - *Melanie's story*

*Melanie came to the Law Centre after having received an eviction notice and was helped by one of our Local Authority funded caseworkers. Melanie and her partner were in arrears with their rent and a possession order had been obtained by their local authority landlord. Melanie's partner had been off work due to illness for a significant period and together with the cost-of-living crisis they had struggled to pay their rent.*

*The Law Centre liaised with the landlord and helped Melanie make an application to the Court to suspend the eviction. The landlord agreed to the eviction being suspended provided that Melanie and her partner paid the rent plus a manageable amount of money each week towards paying off the arrears. The Court made a suspended order on those terms which meant that Melanie and her partner and their children could remain living in their home.*

## Homelessness Prevention Projects

On 30th April this year the Homelessness Reduction Act Project (HRA) which began in September 2018 and the former Homelessness Prevention Project (HPP) which began in 2019 came to an end. These projects have now been amalgamated and a new Homelessness Prevention Project is in place with funding secured for 2 years. Both projects have proved to be very successful, and we are delighted that through the new project we can continue to offer support to those we are not able to help under the terms of our Legal Aid contract.

# Homelessness Reduction Act

The HRA project, which funded a full-time homelessness prevention paralegal and a Housing solicitor for 1 day a week, enabled us to help both social and private tenants in the local authority areas of Chesterfield, Bolsover and North East Derbyshire. The project has been a huge success.

Between the start of the project in 2018 and the end in April 2023 we have helped prevent the homelessness of:

- 111 households in Bolsover District Council area
- 351 households in Chesterfield Borough Council area
- 273 households in North East Derbyshire District Council area

As well as helping 735 households the project has secured £259,357.26 in financial gains over the three council areas – this is from Discretionary Housing Payments which have helped with shortfalls in rent and rent arrears to grants for household items to moving costs to enable downsizing to cheaper properties.

It is also due to the success of this project over the years that other projects such as the Private Rented Sector Project and the HPP have been developed.

## Case study - Amanda's story

*Amanda was referred to the project for help with her rent arrears, which had built up due to a fluctuation in her housing benefit during lockdown. Amanda needed to move properties to be closer to work as she was having to get 3 busses each way. Her rent arrears were stopping her from accessing the housing register. We applied to the Household Support Fund which cleared Amanda's rent arrears. Amanda can now access the housing register to move to a more suitable property.*

*Amanda was also referred to the debt unit for advice on her other debts.*

# Homelessness Prevention Project

Previously funding 2 homelessness prevention paralegals working closely with the HRA paralegal this project has enabled us to support both social and private tenants in the local authority areas of Amber Valley, Bolsover, Chesterfield, Derbyshire Dales, High Peak and North East Derbyshire.

Last year we saw another increase in enquiries and once again improved on our outcomes from the previous year.



**Enquiries:**

**258**

(up by 89 = 53%)



**Opened Cases:**

**187**

(up by 5  
= 3%)



**Closed Cases:**

**174**

(up by 71  
= 69%)



**Financial Gains**

**£82,325.49**

(up by £22,379.31  
= 37%)



**Homelessness  
preventions:**

**118**

(up by 37 = 46%)

***"That's great, thank you very much! I appreciate it very much for helping me during difficult times. I can move forward."***

## Case study - Betty's story

*Betty was referred to the Homelessness Prevention Project by her landlord who is a housing association. She lives alone in a two-bedroom property and is subject to bedroom tax for under-occupancy. Her income is made up of wages from part-time work and Universal Credit. However, her working hours fluctuate, and this affects her Universal Credit. She was in rent arrears and was served with a Notice Seeking Possession.*

*The Homelessness Prevention Project made an application to the council for Household Support Fund and has asked for her housing register banding to be moved up, so Betty had a higher chance of bidding a one-bedroom property. Betty's rent arrears were all cleared, and her housing register banding has gone up from Band D to Band B.*

Furthermore, the homelessness prevention paralegals often identify other issues the client might face, for example, debts or housing disrepair and refer them to colleagues in our Debt and Housing Units.

*"I really appreciate it and now I know where to go if I need help in the future."*

*"Thank you so very much Amy for all your support throughout this time, it's been much appreciated."*

## The future

Thanks to continued support from Amber Valley Borough Council, Bolsover District Council, Chesterfield Borough Council, Derbyshire Dales District Council, High Peak Borough Council and North East Derbyshire District Council the new project now funds three full-time homelessness prevention paralegals to support tenants in both privately rented and social housing. This year we have welcomed Amy and Elissa to the team.

They will be working alongside Kev to prevent homelessness by providing support and help to enable tenants to either stay in their current home or to find alternative housing.

Being paralegal led projects, these can offer wrap-around support to clients to work to resolve practical issues affecting them. We are able to help secure grants for deposits or rent in advance to access new accommodation; for essential furniture and white goods, and for moving costs. We can also help with clearing rent arrears to prevent evictions and allow access to housing registers.

## Housing Repair Support Service

This is the second year of the Housing Repair Support Service (HRSS). The project made possible by the support and funding of Bolsover District Council, Chesterfield Borough Council and North East Derbyshire District Council, enables us to assist and support both social housing and private sector tenants in having necessary repairs completed, ensuring local homes are both fit for habitation and of a good standard of repair in line with the requirements of current legislation.

Our excellent working relationships and contact with our local councils and housing associations means we can continue to assist with the swift resolution of repairs and negotiation of any appropriate damages whereby tenants will be entitled keep 100% of any compensation received.



## Case study - Amanda's story

Amanda had a longstanding issue of disrepair in her rental property. She had for almost a year reported a leak in her bathroom which meant that she was unable to use the shower properly and had to put up with a wet floor and the and the worry over water getting in electrical appliances and the embarrassment as to the state of the property in addition to the stress and inconvenience she sustained in repeated attempts to resolve the leak.

Amanda contacted the Derbyshire Law Centre whose involvement led to the landlord repairing the shower and releasing a compensation payment to her. Amanda was not charged for the service and retained 100% of the compensation received.

## Case study - Samantha's story

Samantha had several issues of disrepair affecting her rental property. She contacted the Derbyshire Law Centre's Housing Repair Support Service who in turn contacted the landlord.

The landlord agreed to a schedule of repair works and due to the extensive nature of the works provided Samantha with alternative accommodation whilst the works were being carried out.

Samantha was offered compensation in addition to the repairs being completed.



73 clients supported

*"My house had disrepair problems since I moved in 5 years ago. The previous tenants had problems with leaks through the kitchen roof, the landlord fixed it but it didn't last. It got so bad that we couldn't live in the house anymore and the team at Gussie's kitchen told me about the Law Centre.*

*If I'd have been on my own, I wouldn't have known what to do. Stephen was able to come to meetings, even when it was an emergency and go through the legal things with me. It's been very complicated and I'm so glad that he gave me so much advice.*

*A lot of people don't know what to do and don't know where to get support so it's really good that the Law Centre are there. Stephen and Lisa are both so lovely and helpful, I'm so grateful for what they've done."*

# Making a difference through campaigning

Over the last year the national media has increasingly drawn attention to some of the worst outcomes of climbing poverty rates in the UK. News items such as disrepair in rented properties have shone a light on the multiple layers of disadvantage that many people are living with. Derbyshire residents are not immune from these issues, and we have been working hard to raise awareness and attention so that local people know what their rights are and where they can get help.

Working alongside the Law Centres Network, we have been involved in local and national campaigns including:

## Predatory businesses profit off personal debt - Channel 4 News & Bureau of Investigative Journalism

Our debt Solicitor Sue Allard, alongside debt client's Catherine and Michael Mason, spoke to journalists about the dangers of Individual Voluntary Arrangements and how intermediary companies win whilst many clients end up with worse debts than when they started. We were approached by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism for information and worked alongside other Debt agencies like Citizens Advice and StepChange to provide an insight into the issues with IVAs.



Sue Allard (right) on Channel 4 News

## Case study - Catherine and Michael Mason's story

Catherine and Michael came to the Law Centre after being mis sold IVAs (Individual Voluntary Arrangements). They were told by their IVA provider that that they weren't eligible for a DRO (Debt Relief Orders) to wipe their debts and were advised that clearing their debts by monthly payments over 5 years was their only option.

However, the IVA provider failed to make it clear that they would be taking a large chunk of the money for their fees, and creditors would hardly get a thing. We worked through Catherine and Michael's paperwork, and it was obvious that they were eligible for a DRO, once an accurate and unbiased budget had been done.

We helped them to terminate their IVAs and apply for a DRO instead. This involved Catherine and Michael each paying a one off fee of £90 to the Insolvency Service, rather than £80 per month for 5 years to their IVA provider (a whopping £4800 in total), and they both now have a fresh start, free from debt. Their case highlights the benefits of accessing free, independent and specialist debt advice that the Law Centre offers.

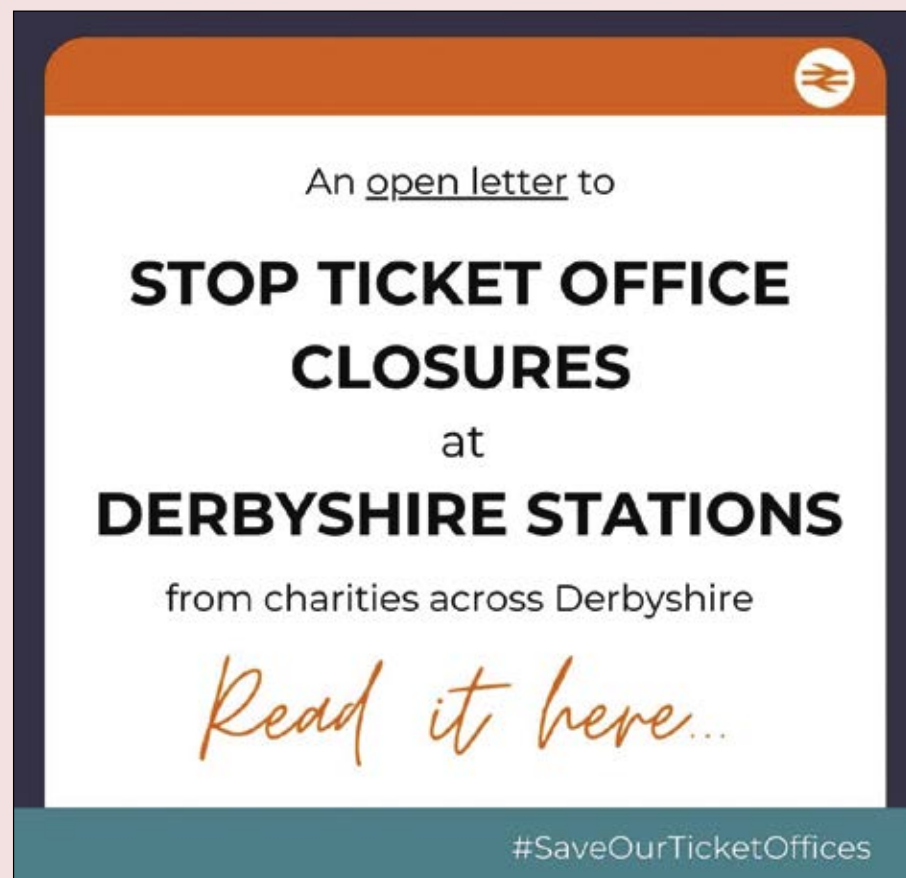
We'd like to thank Catherine and Michael for agreeing to speak to the media team and helping to raise awareness of this issue to help others.



Mr and Mrs Mason on Channel 4 News

## Derbyshire charities campaign to keep rail ticket offices open - a collective open letter, penned by the Derbyshire Law Centre

Proposed ticket office closures will have a detrimental and discriminatory impact on those who rely on their services, particularly those who already experience discrimination because of their disability or age. We worked with disability and elderly care charities across Derbyshire to campaign against the closure of ticket offices. We wrote an open letter to the Rail Delivery Company in charge of the planned closures which was collectively signed by the charities. This was widely picked up on social media and gained local press coverage.



Social Media campaign to Stop Ticket Office Closures

## Have you been approached by cold callers about your disrepair? - in partnership with Bolsover District and Chesterfield Borough Councils

There has been an increase in claims from farmers and cold callers exploiting vulnerable people with disrepair issues in Derbyshire. These firms sell on the data collected from enquiries or take the majority of any compensation from disrepair claims, often without sorting the disrepair issue or fully communicating with the council or landlord. We worked with local councils to run a leaflet and online campaign to signpost tenants to free, credible legal advice. Our excellent working relationships and contact with local councils and housing associations means we can assist with the swift resolution of repairs and negotiation of any appropriate damages whereby tenants will be entitled to keep 100% of any compensation received.



Social Media campaign for Disrepair in Derbyshire



# Partnerships in the Community

Working with local authorities, external agencies and organisations in our community is essential to our success. We rely on our partners for referrals and support on cases and clients. Over the past year we have worked to strengthen these relationships through projects like EARRS, the Employment Advice Rapid Response Service as well as working more closely with other Charities and Local Organisations.

## Gussie's Kitchen

This year our Housing Caseworker's have been running outreach sessions at Gussie's Kitchen at St Augustine's Church in Chesterfield. Gussie's is a foodbank and an essential part of the community. Through our Chair Jenny Flood, we have a strong connection with Gussie's Kitchen and in many instances have referred our clients to their service.

We attend Gussie's on a Wednesday morning and are one of a group of advice agencies that help visitors. This September we were also pleased to have a stall at the Gussie's Summer Gala to speak to local residents and share our handy household merchandise.

Our outreach at Gussie's means that we can have an informal conversations with people to identify any housing, debt or employment issues. We can help to understand the different elements of their problem and see which of our internal units can help or whether we need to signpost them to an external partner.



Nikki and councillors at ThinkFest



Jenny Flood and Rob Busby at our Foodbank drive



# Raising Awareness of the Law Centre

This year we have focused on raising our profile in the local community by having a presence at events and giving presentations to local groups and organisations. We greatly appreciate being asked to give presentations about our services and the areas of law that we practice and have given these to groups including: Derbyshire Mental Health forums, Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust; CAB Chesterfield and Chesterfield College to name a few.



Millie, Nikki and Rachael at Chesterfield Pride

We have worked closely with charities such as Fairplay to help raise awareness of different types of Discrimination, especially those related to Disability in this instance. Earlier this year we attended Fairplay's open day to meet children and young people with disabilities, as well as their carers, to speak to them about discrimination challenges they may be facing and what options are available now or in the future.

Attending events like the May Day Gala, Chesterfield Pride and ThinkFest help us to raise our profile with lots of different parts of the community. They provide a good opportunity for people to speak to us about any legal issues and start the enquiry process and allow us to network with other organisations, meet funders and recruit volunteers.

## The Barings Foundation Project

This year we have secured funding from the Barings Foundation to employ a Community Outreach Worker.

The role is crucial to our partnership working and will raise awareness of discrimination rights amongst young people with disabilities, their carers and associated communities. The Community Outreach position will be able to give talks, presentations and interactive workshops to help young people identify discrimination and be able to challenge it with the support of the Derbyshire Law Centre.

The project aims to achieve social change by tackling discrimination and disadvantage through empowerment and engagement. The project intends to help young people (14 to 34 year olds) act on their situations and work collaboratively to challenge discrimination. Part of the role is to work with relevant local organisations and deliver presentations to young people and/or staff to raise awareness of individual's legal rights and to encourage partner or self-referral to the Law Centre.

# Financial review of the year

**We have once again achieved financial success with a surplus of over £82,000. It should be noted that over £70,000 is linked to restricted funded projects which will be spent during 2023/24. It still means that we had a small surplus of almost £12,000 on our core fund reserves.**

Our core reserves now stand at £326,177. This is as a result of many funding applications, (the majority of which were approved), the recruitment of a new funding coordinator and robust financial and funding strategies and is an adequate amount to cover any potential closure cost liabilities.

The support of our core funders, Derbyshire County Council, Chesterfield Borough Council, Bolsover District Council and North East Derbyshire District Council is still central to our service, and we thank them for showing how important free legal advice is. Without this core funding, we would be unable to attract the funds that we do from other funders. We greatly appreciate their continued commitment to Derbyshire Law Centre.

During the year we signed a 27-month contract to extend funding from East Midland Money Advice for our debt advice service. Various local authority funded services and projects were also extended in respect of our housing and homelessness prevention work.

Our immigration work in respect of European Union Settlement Scheme continued to be funded, albeit on a reduced basis.

New "one-off" funding was awarded by Access to Justice under their "Help Accessing Legal Support" fund and the Institute of Money Advisers provided financial support to our Debt Advice service in respect of Debt Relief Orders.

We are hopeful for the future. After many years with a minimal number of volunteers, funding from the National Lottery Fund, now means we can employ a volunteer coordinator who will recruit volunteers in all aspects of the work we do at Derbyshire Law Centre.

We continue to meet our strategic aims in our Financial Strategy.

Finally, in addition to the local authority core funders, we would like to thank the following funders that have helped maintain a thriving, essential service for the disadvantaged residents of Derbyshire:

- East Midlands Money Advice
- Amber Valley Borough Council
- Access to Justice
- AB Charitable Trust
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- Derbyshire Public Health
- The National Lottery Community Fund, via Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre
- Institute of Money Advisers
- Erewash Borough Council
- Justice First Foundation
- European Union

A special thanks to staff who took part in the Midlands Legal Support Trust sponsored walk who raised funds for the Law Centre.

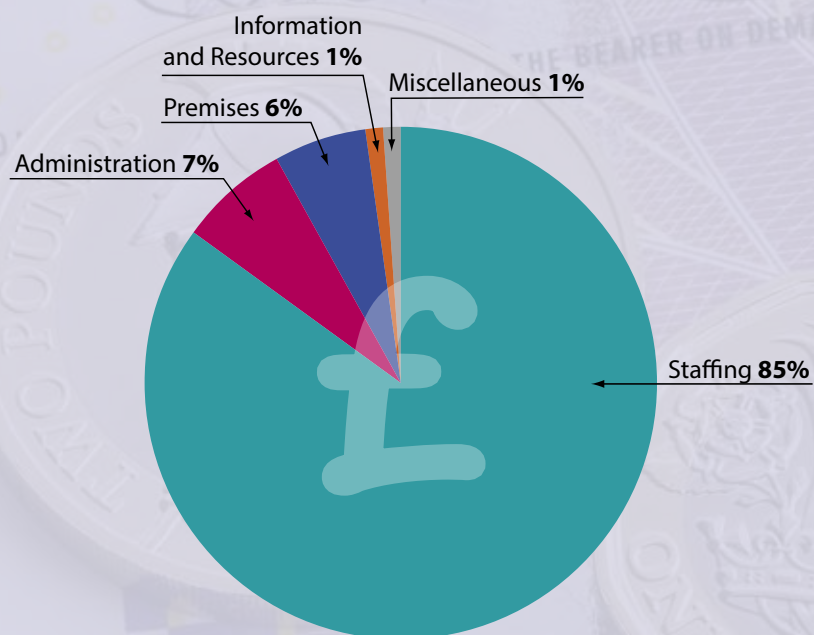
**Sarah White**

**We are also reliant upon donations.  
Donations are accepted through our Facebook page.  
Gift-Aiding increases the value of donations.**

**For full information on our 2022/2023 accounts,  
please see our website  
[www.derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk/about-us](http://www.derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk/about-us)  
where you will find a full copy of the audited accounts.**

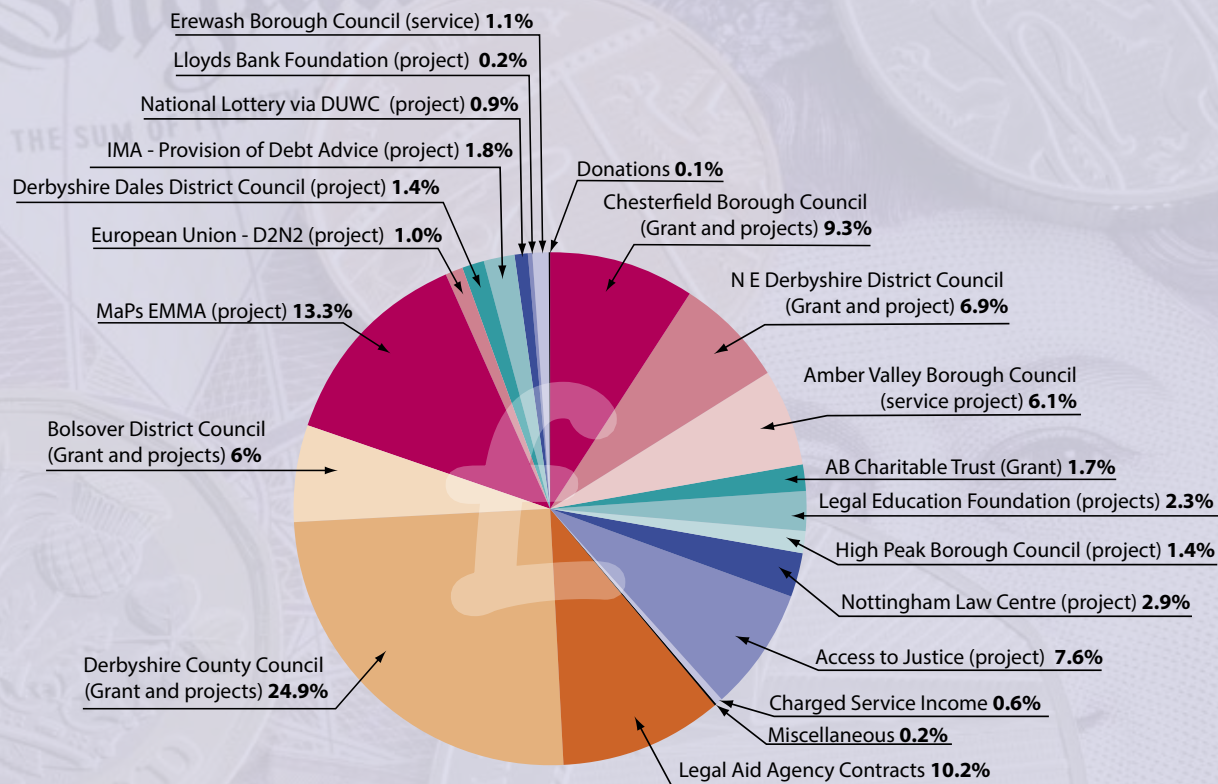


## Total Expenditure 2022/2023



Expenditure £1,056,684

## Total Income 2022/2023



Income £1,149,693



# Volunteering - our plans for the future

**Volunteering has been at the heart of the charity since we opened in 1989. Over time our volunteers have supported several different units and have carried out vital work including front of house positions and assessment.**

This year we were pleased to receive funding from the National Lottery Community Fund which has enabled us to shape and expand our volunteer offering. Crucially this has allowed us to hire Siobhan Hibble who has joined the team as our Volunteer Coordinator. Siobhan is welcoming volunteers from all walks of life and is leading the four-year 'Step into Work' project which will grow our volunteer team and increase the overall capacity of the organisation.

The 'Step Into Work' project aims to increase opportunities and provide valuable skills and experience to individuals who may otherwise face barriers to employment, while providing vital support to the Law Centre's paid staff and clients.

## The Step Into Work Project

The Step Into Work project is part of our wider volunteering and is specifically designed to encourage young people aged 14-25 and individuals with disabilities and/or long-term health conditions.

These groups have been identified as some of those who may struggle to find suitable, fulfilling work experience opportunities to fit their skills and needs. Derbyshire Law Centre aims to induct, train, support and nurture volunteers to increase their skills and confidence to the point where they can move into further education, training or paid work.



*"Thanks to DLC, I met a variety of clients through interviews and call backs and looked at various cases where I got to see different methods that were applied and the analytical approach that goes behind building a successful case. I gained experience in seeing the best way to interact with vulnerable clients. I really enjoyed my time at DLC as all the staff are so focused on the clients and ensuring that they get the best possible result, while aiding me in learning more about the field of social law."*

*Amy Powell, University Student Placement*



# What can volunteers do at the Law Centre?

Anyone can volunteer at the Law Centre and full training is provided for a range of roles including:



## Administrative Support

*Supporting Law Centre staff with filing, postage, paperwork, basic typing and telephony as required.*



## Feedback & Evaluation

*Contacting current and former clients of the Law Centre both in person and via telephone to complete client surveys, gather feedback and 'check in' for client wellbeing.*



## Assessment/Triage

*Contacting new clients who have made an initial enquiry via the Law Centre's reception to assess their needs and refer/signpost as appropriate, either to a unit/units within the Law Centre or to an external organisation if the issue falls outside the Law Centre's remit. An assessment matrix is used to determine how each query should be handled and volunteers are supervised throughout their shifts should they need to ask for advice or guidance.*



## Communications & Events

*Supporting with creation and distribution of content both internally and externally to promote the Law Centre's work. Volunteers will also attend volunteer fairs and other events to promote the work of the Law Centre and attract new volunteers. Comms & events volunteers can also support with fundraising efforts through assisting with or running their own events to raise money for the Law Centre's work.*



## Short Term Placement (school/college/university)

*Arranged through educational institutions, placements can last one week – one year depending on the student's course requirements. Tasks and responsibilities will be agreed case by case depending on the length of placement.*



## Trustee (Member of Management Committee)

*A professional from a local council/organisation who represents the interests of the Law Centre's client base, to join our Management Committee, attend regular meetings and provide insight and expertise to support with the governance of the organisation.*

**If you are interested in learning more about volunteering with the Law Centre please contact our Volunteer Coordinator,**

**Siobhan Hible, email:**

**[siobhan.hible@derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk](mailto:siobhan.hible@derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk)**

# Making a difference for our team

Learning and Development for workers and volunteers is a core element at the Derbyshire Law Centre. From Trainee Solicitor Contracts and Professional CPD, to accreditations and day courses, our focus on learning helps us to address new and emerging areas of law so that we can provide the best support for the communities we serve.

## Support through legal qualifications

This year two of our current colleagues Gary and Patrick qualified as Solicitors. Both were supported through their Training Contracts and worked in different units in the Law Centre before qualifying. Find out a bit about their stories:

### Gary's Journey

Gary featured in our 2021-22 Annual Report when he was in the middle of his training contract. Gary's training contract was supported by the Legal Education Foundation and the Justice First Fellowship. He overcame the barriers of working remotely during the pandemic and enthusiastically embraced the different areas of Law that he worked in throughout his studies.



Gary Steel, newly qualified Solicitor

*"It has been wonderful working with Gary and seeing him grow and develop as his training contract has progressed. We're really pleased that he's been able to stay on at the Law Centre as a Solicitor, continuing his legal aid work in employment and goods and services, and keeping us cheerful with his positive approach to life and work."*

*Ellen Taylor, employment supervisor for Gary through 2021 - 23.*

## Patrick's Journey

Patrick qualified as a Solicitor in August 2022. Before coming to Derbyshire Law Centre Patrick worked in private practice funded by Legal Aid contracts and he completed his LPC at the University of Derby in 2020. He was the first Trainee Solicitor solely funded by the Law Centre which chose to support his qualification because of his tenacity, thoughtfulness and skills at a litigator. Following on from his qualification Patrick has taken up the post of Employment and Legal Aid Area of Law Supervisor.

*"I would like to say a big thank you to the Derbyshire Law Centre for the continued support throughout my case... Patrick went over and beyond to help me and I am very grateful to him. He is a great asset to your team. I wish you nothing but the best in future and keep up the brilliant work"*

*Mr Khan, one of Patrick's clients in an Employment Discrimination Legal Aid case 2020-22.*



Patrick Macken, newly qualified Solicitor

## Learning & Development for our support team

Legal training is just one part of the Learning and Development that we support. Our Admin, Front of House, Finance and Coordination unit also make sure that ongoing training is a key priority. This might be Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training biannually or undertaking the Communications Access UK accreditation.

### Kyle's Journey

Kyle began working at the Derbyshire Law Centre in 2021 as a Finance Apprentice. Since then, he's been studying his AAT qualifications and has recently completed his Level 2 AAT and is starting on his Level 3.



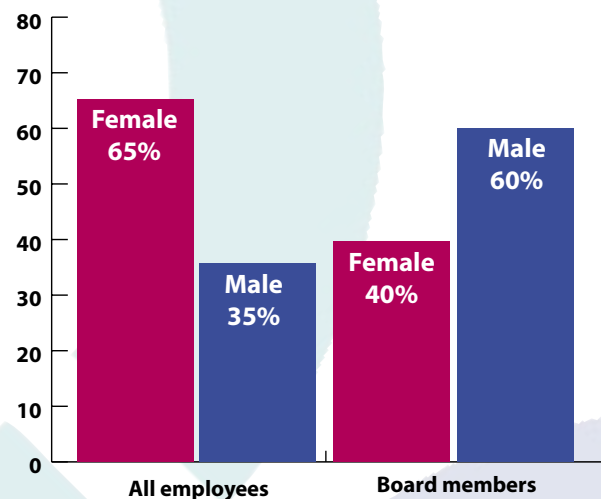
Kyle and Supervisor Sharon interviewed by AAT

*"Since starting my AAT career at Derbyshire Law Centre as part of the finance team I have been guided throughout the whole process. All members of staff have been very helpful and welcoming but especially Sharon & Fran who have really helped me settle in and pass all my exams with ease. Whenever I've had questions, I haven't hesitated to ask. This has made me really enjoy my time so far and makes me excited to continue progressing down the AAT route with the Law Centre."*

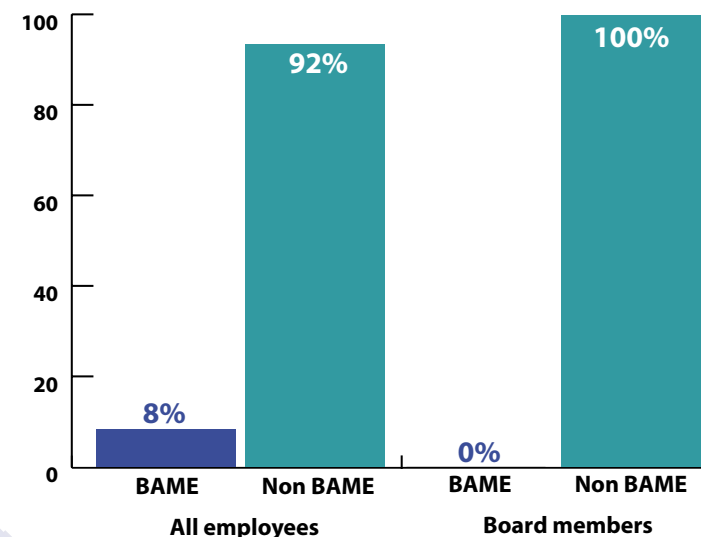
*Kyle, AAT Finance Apprentice*

# Equity, diversity and inclusion in our team

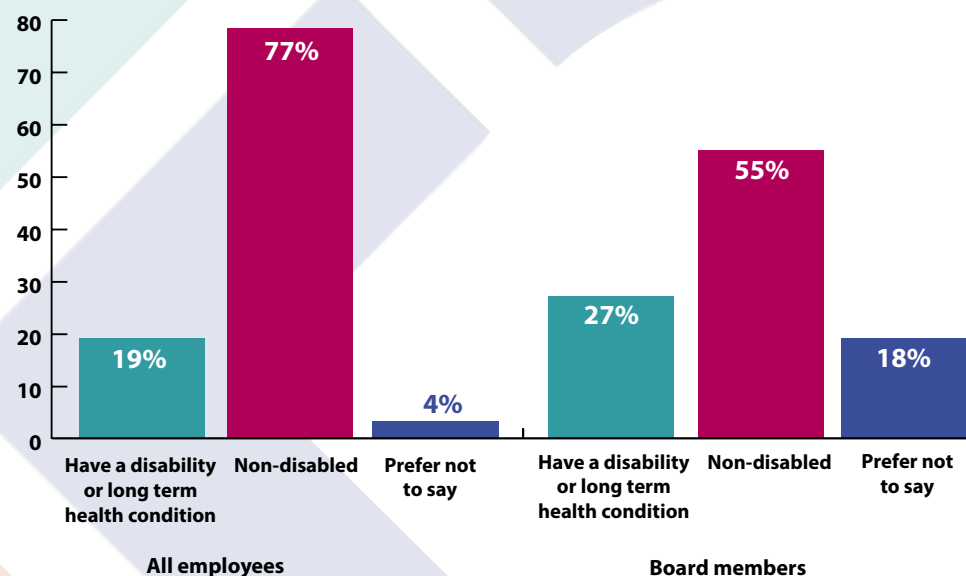
## Gender of employees and board members



## Ethnicity of employees and board members



## Disability or long term health condition of employees and board members



## Age ranges of our employees

under 25 yrs	=	23%
26 - 35yrs	=	26.9%
36 - 45yrs	=	11.5%
46 - 55yrs	=	11.5%
56 - 65yrs	=	26.9%
66 - 75yrs	=	0%
75+yrs	=	0%
Prefer not to say	=	0%

## Age ranges of the Board

under 25 yrs	=	0%
26 - 35yrs	=	13%
36 - 45yrs	=	0%
46 - 55yrs	=	0%
56 - 65yrs	=	47%
66 - 75yrs	=	20%
75+yrs	=	20%
Prefer not to say	=	0%



# Thank you to our funders and community partners

Throughout this annual report we have showcased the importance of our partnerships in the community and the exceptionally valuable support of our funders.

Despite the challenging economic circumstance that many of our funders find themselves in, we continue to receive much appreciated support and on behalf of our collective staff and the hundreds of clients that we have helped through 2022-23, thank you.

Our successful relationships with funders, particularly with Local Authorities, allows us to achieve strong outcomes for many residents of Derbyshire. This year, more than ever, we have seen just how essential our Outreach, Homelessness Reduction and Prevention and Housing Repair Service are and we are pleased to continue this work with the support of local funders.

Funding not only helps us to continue the vital work that we do in our core areas of Law but also to look more closely at the various types of Law that we do not cover and additional services, to ensure that we fully support our client base.

We are excited about new projects and colleagues who have joined us for 2024 and beyond, particularly in the roles of Community Outreach Worker supported by the Barings Foundation and the Volunteer Coordinator, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Throughout 2024 we will also be looking at structuring specific funding, ringfenced to assist Ukrainian refugees through our immigration and housing units. Additionally, we hope to be able to expand our holistic approach to be able to offer some related Family Law areas, for those who are most vulnerable.

And finally, we extend our thanks to the Legal Community. Organisations such as Access to Justice, the Law Society, Sheffield & District Law Society, the Legal Education Foundation, Justice Together and the Law Centre Network to name a small few, support us through funding as well as professional training and ongoing support that help us to provide a culture of development and learning so we can work effectively on behalf of Derbyshire Residents.



*The Housing Unit at the launch of the Derbyshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, May 2023*



# The Team at Derbyshire Law Centre



**Sue Allard**  
Solicitor  
(Debt)



**Madison Aspinall**  
Caseworker  
(Housing)



**Helen Bagley**  
Co-ordinator  
(Strategic Lead)



**Millie Barlow**  
Communications  
Worker



**Matthew Brown**  
Solicitor  
(Housing)



**Richard Carter**  
Administrator  
(Reception)



**Sharon Challands**  
Co-ordinator (Finance,  
Office and Resources)



**Jane Clarence**  
Administrator  
(Caseworker Support)



**Liz Clarke**  
Administrator  
(Reception)



**Vanessa Edwards**  
Assessment  
Supervisor



**Mae Elsemore-Renshaw**  
Caseworker  
(Immigration)



**Tom Fletcher**  
Caseworker  
(Employment)



**Kyle Gudgeon**  
Finance Apprentice



**Elissa Hartley**  
Paralegal  
(Homelessness  
Prevention)



**Lisa Haythorne**  
Senior Solicitor



**Hannah Haythorne**  
Paralegal  
(Housing)



**Siobhan Hibble**  
Co-ordinator  
(Volunteering)



**Michelle Humphreys**  
Administrator



**Tracey Humphries**  
Administrator



**Tracy Keepings-Crummack**  
Outreach Worker



**Amy Law**  
Paralegal  
(Homelessness  
Prevention)



**Patrick Macken**  
Solicitor  
(Employment)



**Kate Morgan**  
Caseworker  
(Debt)



**Stephen Oliver**  
Solicitor  
(Housing)



**Sally Preece**  
Caseworker  
(Debt)



**Rachael Priest**  
Co-ordinator  
(Funding &  
Impact)



**Sagar Shah**  
Solicitor  
(Immigration)



**Gary Steel**  
Solicitor  
(Employment &  
Discrimination)



**Nikki Tugby**  
Co-ordinator  
(Service Delivery)



**Kev Weston**  
Paralegal  
(Homelessness  
Prevention)



**Codie Whitworth**  
Paralegal  
(Housing)



**Jessica Wright**  
Finance Assistant

# Thank you to our Trustees

The Law Centre is governed by our board of trustees, known as our Management Committee. There are 14 places on the Management Committee which is made up of representatives from local groups and individuals elected at our Annual General Meeting, with an additional six places that are reserved for representatives from our council funders and another five places for co-opted members.

It has been another busy year and we have seen several changes to the committee. Following the local elections in May, we said goodbye to Councillor Howard Borell and Councillor Alan Powell and welcomed Councillor Nick Redihough and Councillor Kathy Rouse in their places. We also said goodbye to Derrick Skinner, Michael Gordon, Sasha Lawrence, Karen Gurney and Margaret Jones. In June we were sad to learn of the death of Councillor Roger Redfern who had been a representative for DCC since March 2022.

We would like to thank all our past and present trustees for their support to help us to deliver our aims and objectives.

We are looking forward to working with our trustees for the coming year and to seeing the conclusion of the work to review our governing documents.

## Our current committee members

We currently have 15 members. The members in blue will remain on the committee until the AGM in December when new committee members will be elected.

## Our Management Committee Members

Representative	Representing
Councillor Jenny Flood - Chair	Chesterfield Borough Council
Rob Busby (Vice Chair from 30/6/2021)	Individual member
Sarah White – Treasurer	Individual member
Councillor Mick Wilson - Secretary	Ripley Town Council
John Duncan	Individual member
Colin Hampton	Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centre
Councillor Duncan McGregor	Bolsover District Council
Councillor Nick Redihough	Chesterfield Borough Council
Councillor Andy Rouse – (co-opted member)	Clay Cross Parish Council
Councillor Kathy Rouse	North East Derbyshire District Council
David Shaw	Citizens Advice Chesterfield
Julie Skill	Derby and District Law Society
Elaine Tidd	Individual member
Angela Webster	Staveley Seniors
Councillor Jack Woolley	Derbyshire County Council

***“As a solicitor I was instrumental in setting up the Law Centre over 30 years ago and remain totally committed to the principle of securing justice for all regardless of the ability to pay. In today’s unequal society this service is needed more than ever.”***

*David Shaw, trustee*

***‘I joined the Law Centre because I am passionate about equal access to justice for all and helping my local community. I feel privileged to be part of the law centre and to support the amazing work that the organisation does in helping people through incredibly difficult times in their lives. The Law Centre has grown in strength and numbers over the years. I look forward to seeing the organisation continue to grow to ensure that as many people as possible across Derbyshire can access the invaluable services that it provides.’***

*Sarah White, Treasurer*



# Our Members

*As a member of Derbyshire Law Centre, you will be able to attend and vote (only organisational members can vote) at annual general meetings and general meetings and you are able to be nominated for election to the Board of Trustees and nominate other individual members or representatives of organisational members. If you would like any further information about membership, please contact us.*

**We are delighted to have gained new members in 22/23. Thank you to all members that support us.**

## Individual members

Amanda Astle  
Shay Boyle  
Robert Busby  
John Alan Crow  
Chris Collard  
Andrew Cross  
Chloe Doxey  
Rachel Driver  
John Duncan  
David Eccles  
Graham Fairs  
Terry Gilby  
Patricia Gilby  
Ruth George  
Michael Gordon  
Mark Grayling  
Mike Greenhalf  
Karen Gurney  
Mary Honeyben  
Trevor Hughes  
Linda James  
Sasha Lawrence  
Genet Morley  
Kevin Morley  
Dennis Mullings  
Martin O'Kane  
Enid Robinson

Clarke Rogerson  
Hazel Rotherham  
Y Sorefan  
Marion Thorpe  
Elaine Tidd  
Teresa Waldron  
Alison Westray-Chapman  
Sarah White

## Organisational members

African Caribbean Community Association  
BrightLife  
Age UK - Derby and Derbyshire  
Aldercar and Langley Mill Parish Council  
Asian Association of Chesterfield and North Derbyshire  
Ault Hucknall Parish Council  
Bamford with Thornhill Parish Council  
Belper Town Council  
Bradwell Parish Council  
Bretby Parish Council  
Brimington Parish Council  
Burnaston Parish Council  
Chesterfield 50+ Inspired Group  
Chesterfield Ability  
Chesterfield Care Group  
C'field and North Derbyshire Tinnitus Support Grp  
C'field Constituency Labour Party  
C'field Liberal Democrats  
C'field Muslim association

Chesterfield Children's Centre  
Church on the Bus  
Citizens Advice Chesterfield  
Citizens Advice Derbyshire Districts  
Clay Cross Parish Council  
Cruse Bereavement Care  
Deaf and Hearing Support - Chesterfield  
Deaf-initely Women  
Derby and District Law Society  
Derbyshire Alcohol Advice Service  
Derbyshire Gypsy Liason Grp  
Derbyshire LGBT+  
Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre  
Eckington Parish Council  
Elm Foundation  
Elmton with Creswell Parish Council  
Grassmoor, Hasland and Winsick Parish Council  
The Guinness Partnership  
Hartington Upper Quarter Parish Council  
Heanor and Loscoe Town Council  
Heath and Holmewood Parish Council  
Hulland Ward Parish Council  
Links CVS  
Matlock Town Council  
Middleton by Wirksworth Parish Council  
Muslim Welfare Association - Chesterfield and North Derbyshire

NE Derbyshire Labour Party  
Mental Health Carers Community - Chesterfield and North Derbyshire  
Old Bolsover Town Council  
Our Vision Our Future  
Overseal Parish Council  
RELATE C'field  
Ripley Town Council  
Rural Action Derbyshire  
SAIL  
Salcare  
Sanctuary Housing Association  
Shirland and Higham Parish Council  
Sight Support Derbyshire  
Staveley Seniors Forum  
Staveley Town Council  
Stenson Fields Parish Council  
Stoney Middleton Parish Council  
The Volunteer Centre - Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire  
Tibshelf Parish Council  
Touchstone Community Development Ltd  
TRUST  
UNISON - CBC  
UNISON - NEDDC  
Unstone Parish Council  
USDAA - Chesterfield  
Whitwell Parish Council  
Wingerworth Parish Council  
Winster Parish Council  
Wirksworth Town Council



# Client Feedback

**Client feedback is important to us as it helps us to identify areas for improvement.**

We continue to request feedback via electronic means, in that we e-mail/text the client a link to a 365 Form. As in previous years where there is no e-mail address or the client's preference is paper, then a physical form is sent with a SAE. On its return a staff member inputs their responses. Whilst this approach over the past few years has shown an increase in responses, this year there has been a significant drop. Of the 1256 cases closed, who would have been invited to provide feedback only 52 (4.1%) clients have done so. The reason for this drop is not known.

## Google Reviews ★★★★★

This year we received 7 reviews. Of the 7, 4 awarded us 5 stars and 3 awarded us 3, giving us an overall rating of 4.2 stars.

## Complaints

In June 2023 we reviewed and implemented a new complaints policy and procedure. The policy provides clear guidance to clients on how to make a complaint and the response they should expect from staff at the Law Centre; that any complaint raised will not have a negative impact on the conduct of their case. The new policy and procedure are now available on our website.

We are in the fortunate position to be able to report that we have not received any formal complaints during the period. That is not to say that we have not had people asking about how to raise a complaint or saying they wish to, however, in these cases we have managed to address their concerns prior to it escalating.

## Gifts and Donations

As a legal charity we also must monitor any donations we receive, be that financial or gifts. A book is maintained in the reception in accordance with the Lexcel policy where gifts and donations are recorded and signed off by the Anti Bribery Officer. A review of the donations book and accounts for the last financial year reveals we have received several gifts or donations.

Thank you to all who have donated financially or sent cards and gifts. It is appreciated by all the staff, volunteers, and trustees.

## Feedback received shows that



*"I would like to thank everyone that has helped me."*

*"Sue Allard, Gary, and the whole team were absolutely brilliant with me. They were patient, understanding and have done wonders for me. Thank you so much I can't stress how much you have improved me and my life. My mental health was in a terrible way 12 months ago and now I'm ready for a fresh start. A special mention to Sue Allard. Thank you."*

*"Very impressed with service I received by the company."*

*"Sally was amazing for me I can't thank her enough. Sally took the pressure off me and was very supportive kind explained everything and did not judge me. She made an awful situation for me a lot easier."*

*"The service I received really helped me to find all debts I owed and helped me get them sorted so now I am no longer in any debt."*

*"I want to take the opportunity to thank the law centre for their help and support and for changing my life for the better."*

*"Hats off to Patrick Macken."*

*"This business is amazing! They helped me with my Fiancé Visa and now we are happily living in the UK as a family. I will definitely be going back to them when I need to reapply! Beth was absolutely fantastic!"*

*"I find the Law Centre a great attribute to the community and would recommend to anyone."*

*"Sally was absolutely brilliant."*

*"Sue Allard I cannot thank enough for all the help and support she has given me."*

*"Cannot ask for anything better, people feel embarrassed by their situation like I was, but I wouldn't have got through it without the law centre, they do not judge you they help you."*

*"I want to take the opportunity to thank the law centre for their help and support and for changing my life for the better."*

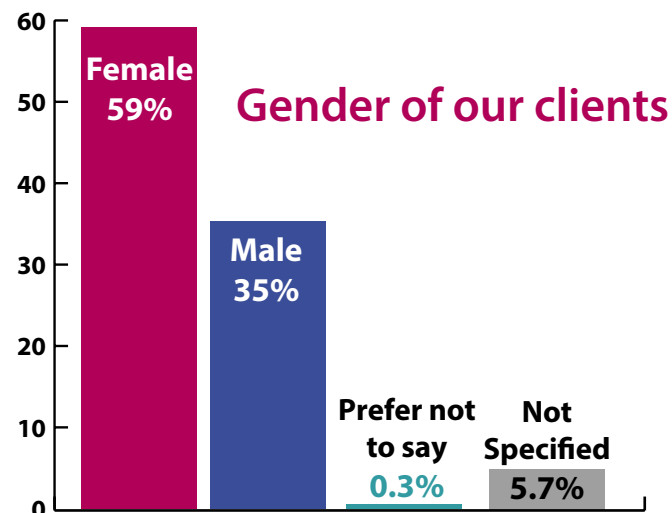
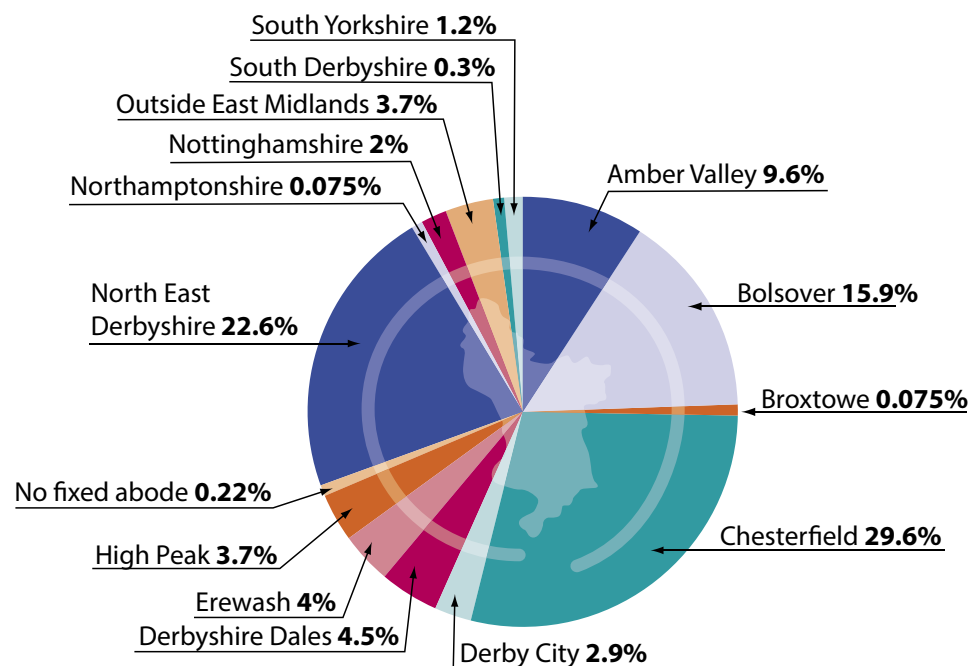
# Making a difference - Who we have helped

## Age ranges of our clients

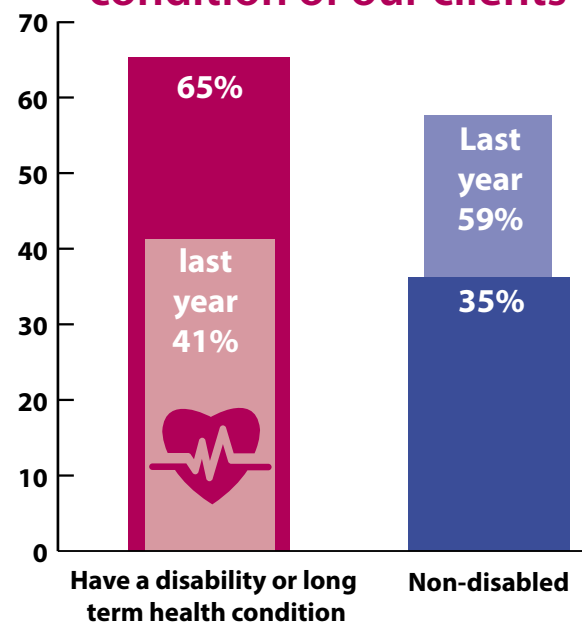
under 24 yrs	=	7%
25 -34yrs	=	23%
35 – 49yrs	=	34%
50 – 64yrs	=	28%
Over 65+yrs	=	5%
Prefer not to say	=	3%



## Where our clients live



## Disability or long term health condition of our clients



# Our Organisation

**Derbyshire Law Centre, 1 Rose Hill East, Chesterfield, S40 1NU**

**Registration details:** Derbyshire Law Centre is a company limited by guarantee: 2453081

**Registered Charity No:** 702419

**Solicitors Regulation Authority:** Practice No 71302

**Auditors:** Mitchells Chartered Accountants & Business Advisers, 91-97 Saltergate, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S40 1LA.

# Contact us

**Contact us between 9.30am and 4.30pm Monday to Friday.**

We have appointments available in offices throughout Derbyshire: Bolsover, Buxton, Chesterfield, Eckington, Ilkeston and Ripley.

We can also arrange for you to talk to a specialist via telephone or virtually.

**Contact us on: 01246 550674 or 0800 707 6990**

**Email: [dlc@derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk](mailto:dlc@derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk)**

**Text: 07781 482826**

**Textphone for deaf people: 18001 01246 550674**

# Help us to make a difference

With your help we can continue to increase the number of clients we are able to help, support, advise and signpost, helping them to deal with their problems and change their lives.

With growing financial pressures and funding cuts we want to make sure that we are able to continue to offer services to help even more residents in Derbyshire.

# How you can help

If you'd like to find out more about partnering with Derbyshire Law Centre to help make a difference for people most in need in Derbyshire, get in touch at [dlc@derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk](mailto:dlc@derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk)

To donate to help us make a difference, visit our website at [www.derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk](http://www.derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk)

If you believe in what we do and want to become a member contact us to find out more.



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