

UNLOCKING JUSTICE FOR OUR COMMUNITY

Your specialist legal advice charity

ANNUAL REPORT
2023/24



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Like all Law Centres we defend the rights of people who cannot afford high legal fees. 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.

The case studies in this Annual Report are all based on real cases but locations, names, ages and pictures have been changed to protect clients. Thank you to all of our clients who have shared their stories and views.

All statistics in the annual report are measured from 1st September 2023 - 31st August 2024.

OUR MISSION, VALUES AND STRATEGIC AIMS

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, non-judgemental 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.



CHAIR'S WELCOME

The Derbyshire Law Centre has been busy this year working to ensure that we can obtain justice for the community. We feel that we have continued to develop valuable working relationships to achieve the desired outcomes on new projects. We have been working in some of the most deprived areas in our County, unlocking justice for those being discriminated against, suffering with serious disrepair in their homes, and no-fault evictions by rogue landlords.

Our team have worked extremely hard and are committed to delivering high quality services that are growing each year.

We have managed to bring in additional finance despite ever increasing competition for a smaller pool of funding, which we believe is the result of our holistic approach to justice.

Like other charities, we have experienced the problem of core funding cuts by local government and my thanks goes to the finance and management team for looking at how to revise our business plan to meet the challenges that face us as a result.

I wish to place on record our thanks to the staff and volunteers

for their continued support for the Derbyshire Law Centre. The Annual Report shows how we use the resources so that we can deliver on our mission statement and work for clients.

The Trustees have continued to review the governance of the Law Centre and have also been identifying what potential changes we may need to make to more effectively support the staff; one such initiative has been to employ a new Human Resource Advisor to improve efficiency and support culture, learning and development.

I wish to thank my fellow Trustees for their support this year and for the way in which they have responded to the difficult decisions we have had to make.

As we look forward to next year we hope that the work we have done, to build connections and awareness in the community will continue to provide for those who need it most.

Jennie Flood
Chair of Trustees

SENIOR SOLICITORS REPORT

UNLOCKING JUSTICE IN DERBYSHIRE



Over the course of the last year the Derbyshire Law Centre has helped local residents through a sustained period of financial uncertainty and difficulty. We are continuing to see a rise in demand for legal advice for all areas of Social Welfare Law and I am proud of the fortitude our team has shown and the exceptional service they've given through 2023-24.

It is true that adversity makes us stronger and this year we have faced situations that we had not expected to encounter. From providing emergency housing advice in the aftermath of Storm Babet in October 2023, to responding to the real-world threat of violence against immigration advice providers in the August riots, time and time again our team have been determined to stand firm and fight for the legal protection of those who need it most.

The financial and political landscape means that we are dealing with an increasing number of urgent cases including a rise in unlawful evictions. As I write the team are helping John, a disabled tenant from Bolsover, who arrived home to find his locks changed. His landlord had told him three days ago via WhatsApp that he needed to find somewhere else.

John has nowhere to go and it's up to our team to work with the local authority and emergency accommodation providers to make sure he has somewhere to sleep tonight; to fight for access to his home and likely seek damages as a result of the turmoil he is facing.

Helping individuals like John helps to build overall resilience in the community and our wrap around service has never been more important. This year we have signposted or assisted over 5,700 enquiries and through this annual report you will find a small number of personal stories from clients whose lives have been impacted by the Law Centre.

My thanks go to our funders, community partners, local authorities, member organisations and Trustees for their on-going support and to our staff and volunteers for continuing to provide essential access to justice for people in Derbyshire.

Lisa Haythorne
Senior Solicitor

CLIENTS AND THEIR NEEDS

STRATEGIC AIM

Our clients are at the heart of everything we do at the Derbyshire Law Centre. This means listening to our clients and responding to their needs, recognising that these needs may change. With the continued cost of living crisis, the number of people turning to us for help and advice remains high.

In line with our mission, we provide a service that is welcoming, non-judgmental and accessible for all. Unfortunately, we cannot help everyone but our assessment team, which is expanding thanks to Lottery Funding, signposts all enquirers that we are not able to help, something we are proud of.

Enquiries 2023 - 24

Immigration
500

= 9% of all enquiries

Employment
1024

= 18% of all enquiries

Debt
866

= 15% of all enquiries

HOUSING
1886

= 33% of all enquiries

Discrimination
161

= 2% of all enquiries

From 1st September 2023 - 31st August 2024,
we advised on:

5798
enquiries.

Of these, 1361 enquiries (23%) were about areas of law that we don't deal with. We signpost and refer these to other agencies. 22% of these enquiries were family related.

WHO ARE OUR CLIENTS?

We aim to provide free and low cost legal advice to people who live in Derbyshire. The level of free vs. charged for work often depends on the resident's local authority, the projects that various councils fund and the legal aid calculation. For some areas of law such as 'charged-for' Employment advice we can work out of area.

For those we can help, we do so by providing either specialist advice, a call back where one-off advice is given, supported writing, letter or e-mail, or a full casework service.

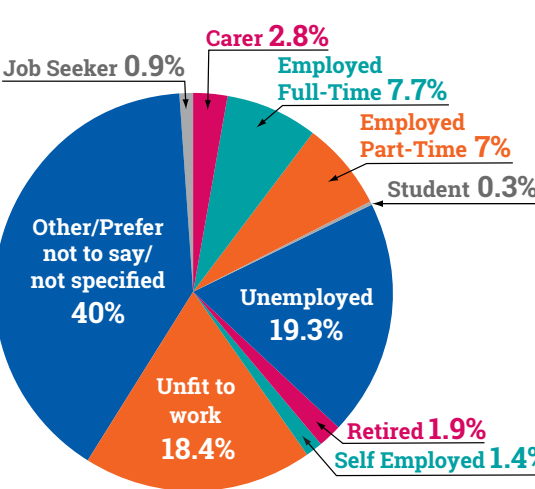
Our plans for the future involve further expansion of our volunteer assessment team, user forums and improved accessibility for marginalised communities.

"It is nice to know people like me have somewhere to go for help and are treated with respect"

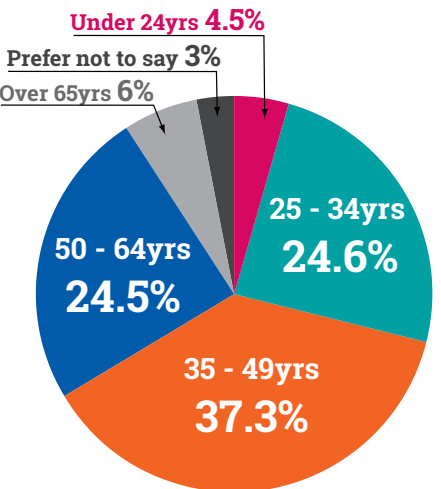
Deborah, a Housing client from Ilkeston

"I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for your patient help and assistance throughout this entire process."

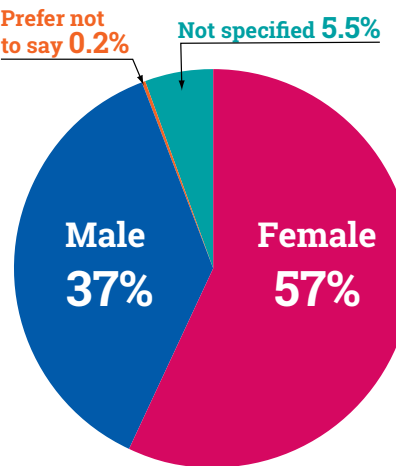
Sajid, an Employment client from Derbyshire Dales



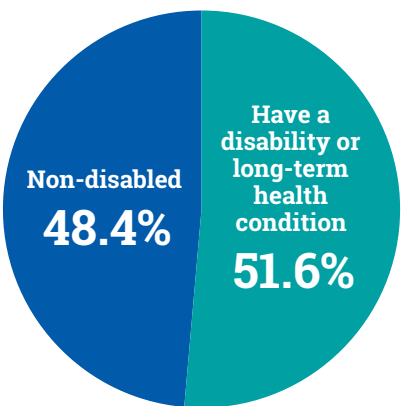
Economic status of our clients



Age range of our clients



Gender of our clients



Disability or long term health condition of our clients

CLIENTS AND THEIR NEEDS

TOM'S STORY

We first met Tom on the 23rd July when he came to Chesterfield County Court for a possession hearing. The mortgage on his property had expired some time before after he fell behind on repayments.

Tom had been working with his accountant to look at ways to prevent him losing his family home but they hadn't found a solution. When he came to court Tom didn't think there was any hope but he spoke to Lisa, a Housing Solicitor, who attended court through the County Court Duty Scheme.

Lisa represented Tom that day and because of her experience she was able to persuade the District Judge to adjourn the case for 2 months.

Did you know...

There has been a 31% increase in mortgage repossessions across the UK in 2024 vs 2023 due to high interest rates and the cost of living crisis.



The case returned to court on 24th September and Lisa was able to demonstrate that steps had been taken to sell the property and Tom was given more time to complete the sale. Without this action Tom and his family would have been evicted by bailiff action on the 29th July.

How did we help Tom?

- Tom was able to get free legal advice and representation at Court, regardless of his income level or home-ownership type.
- We were able to get Tom more time to sort the sale of his own home on the open market.
- We stopped Tom and his family having to move out and prevent bailiff action taking place.
- We helped to give Tom peace of mind and support his mental health through a difficult period in his life.
- We were able to provide wrap around housing and debt advice.

ANGELA'S STORY



In September 2023, Angela, a Zimbabwean national, found herself in a desperate situation after fleeing prolonged domestic abuse. With nowhere to turn, the police temporarily housed her in a hotel, but by the 18th September, her accommodation had run out. We were contacted by Chesterfield Borough Council and immediately stepped in.

Mae, an Immigration Worker visited Angela that same day, helping her apply for the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC), which was granted just five days later. This allowed her to access public funds and Chesterfield Borough Council secured long-term accommodation for her.

With our ongoing support Angela submitted a settlement application as a victim of domestic violence, which was initially refused. Undeterred, we helped her file an administrative review, challenging the decision.

Her journey highlights the critical role of timely legal support in helping vulnerable individuals rebuild their lives.

Over the past year, our Immigration funding from the AB Charitable Trust has enabled us to provide crucial support to women like Angela, who are fleeing domestic violence, helping them secure long-term residence in the UK.

Partners of British citizens and settled individuals who come to the UK on spouse visas are often dependent on the continuation of their relationship to stay in the country, renew their status, and eventually settle permanently. This dependence can leave victims of domestic violence feeling trapped, fearing that leaving an abusive or violent relationship will jeopardize their right to remain in the UK.

Thanks to this funding which continues until March 2025, we've been able to work closely with the Elm Foundation and other domestic abuse charities and refuges in the county to take on these complex cases at no cost to the clients. This has been instrumental in helping vulnerable women navigate the immigration system and find safety and stability.

We help people like Angela

find safety and stability.



CLIENTS AND THEIR NEEDS

JENNIFER'S STORY

Jennifer was an agency worker and had been working at a restaurant for 6 months. One day she had an anxiety attack at work and rang her agency to see if she could use her holiday entitlement to finish early, they agreed and she went home to recover.

When she went back to work the next day she spoke to the agency to thank them for being understanding. But a few days later she received a call to tell her that the restaurant was 'making cut backs' and her assignment was finishing. Non of the agency's other staff in the same roles at the restaurant were being 'cut back' and she thought it was linked to her anxiety attack.

When Jennifer complained to the agency she was told by an agent that it was brought to an end for her 'own good'.

Jennifer sought legal advice from a third party who submitted a complaint to the agency who didn't provide a substantive response.

The third party submitted her complaints to the Employment Tribunal but then told Jennifer they couldn't do anything more. She contacted us to find out her other options.



It became clear that the third party's complaint was outside of the relevant time period and the Agency applied for the complaint to be struck out. The Tribunal set a date for a hearing to determine the issue. The prospect of the hearing and of having her claim struck out made Jennifer's anxiety worse.

How did we help Jennifer?

- Represented Jennifer at the hearing, resulting in her time limit being extended.
- Continued to represent her through mediation with the agency to reach a successful, fair solution.
- Helped to provide peace of mind and reduce Jennifer's anxiety.

TINA'S STORY

Tina has a number of disabilities and health conditions including severe Crohn's disease, mobility problems, and chronic pain. She lives alone and is in receipt of PIP and Universal Credit.

Tina had struggled with debt throughout numerous hospital stays and periods of being housebound. Her social landlord had served a notice as she was behind with rent, and she had a small amount of energy arrears which she was struggling to sort out as her energy company was difficult to contact. She was up to date with council tax, water, TV licence, and had no debts with the DWP.

A few months before we met her, Tina had signed up for an unaffordable Debt Management Plan with a national debt advice agency. She had been using her PIP to keep up with the payments. This had left her unable to afford prescriptions and essential items/adaptations for her disabilities and health conditions.

How did we help Tina?

We advised that she cancel the unaffordable Debt Management Plan immediately and apply for a Debt Relief Order to clear her debts and make a fresh start.

- We completed a DRO application to write off the rent arrears, energy debt, and other non-priority debts (in total over £8,000).
- We liaised with her social landlord to prevent further action on the eviction notice whilst we completed the DRO.
- We contacted the national debt advice agency to let them know that the DMP was unaffordable, and they gave her a goodwill gesture of £250.
- We contacted her energy company to get a prepayment meter installed, so that she could budget more easily after the DRO.

71% of clients

↑ felt their self-confidence and self-esteem improved after speaking to Derbyshire Law Centre



"Sue 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."

SERVICE DELIVERY

STRATEGIC AIM

Committed to delivering high quality core advice services we offer advice and representation in debt, employment, housing and immigration to any Derbyshire based client regardless of race, colour, age, sex, gender, gender re-assignment, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, religion or belief, disability, national or ethnic origin.

The advice we provide is free or low cost, enabling us to fulfil our mission of increasing access to justice for those most in need in our community.

Cases opened 2023 – 24

From 1st September 2023 to 31st August 2024, we opened:

976 cases

Immigration
80
cases
= 8% of all cases

Debt
275
cases
= 29% of all cases

Employment
72
cases
= 7% of all cases

Housing
526
cases
= 54% of all cases

Discrimination
23
cases
= 2% of all cases

Our core service continues to be complemented by a number of projects, enabling us to offer wrap around support. Providing this holistic service allows us to support our clients, not only to cure the problem they initially present with, but also to work on prevention and address any other problems which the client may be facing.

Quality is key to ensuring that our clients receive the best support and representation they can. Our Solicitors are authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority. We have once again retained the Lexcel Quality Mark for 2024.

"The Centre should continue to be highly commended for sustaining an extremely high level of compliance against the Lexcel Standard."

Lexcel Report, 2023

DEBT

Demand for debt advice has remained extremely high over the course of the year, with a noticeable number of urgent cases coming through.

Our clients often feel stressed and anxious, and after talking to us we want them to feel there is a solution that we can help them reach. Breathing Space has continued to be a useful tool to give people time to explore their debt options without the threat of bailiffs or a looming eviction.

We work closely with the Derbyshire Law Centre's Housing Unit to offer wrap-around advice. As the cost of living crisis continues and interest rates remain high we work with clients to keep them in their homes when they accrue rent arrears or have possession proceedings issued against them.

In addition, we work with various local authorities, often taking referrals for people who cannot access the housing register due to rent arrears. We recently met with Chesterfield Borough Council's tenancy support team, enabling us to better understand the pressures they face, and how we can best help their tenants to access our debt advice service.

"Great service. very professional. I don't know what I would have done without your advice and support. On a personal level I am in a much improved mental and financially stable situation. thank you."

John, a Debt client from Chesterfield



Sue and Sally at the IMA Awards

We pride ourselves on an excellent working relationship with our funders at East Midlands Money Advice and we are all pulling together to maximise how we operate on a regional basis. Re-commissioning for 'EMMA' is on the horizon but it has been delayed until April 2026, proving a welcome brief reprieve due to the uncertainty that could bring.

One of the highlights this year for the Debt Unit was being shortlisted for Debt Team of the Year through the Institute Of Money Advisors. Although we didn't win at their annual conference in Birmingham, Sally, Kate and Sue were delighted at this recognition of the emphasis they place on teamwork within the Law Centre's Debt Unit.

SERVICE DELIVERY

HOUSING

Throughout 2023 and 2024, the Housing Unit has continued to fight for Derbyshire residents who are facing issues including unlawful eviction; rising rates of Section 21 notices and growing rent arrears.

We hope for more protection for tenants as the Government continues with its plans to introduce the Renter's Reform Bill to end 'no fault' evictions using Section 21 notices and also 'Awaab's Law' to ensure that properties are fit for purpose and in a good state of repair. However the proposed plans, along with high interest rates, have contributed to a rise in the number of Section 21s being issued and more people at risk of homelessness.

The unit has continued to work with Local Authority partnerships projects which are funded to provide specific support in those areas.

These projects include the Amber Valley Caseworker project which provides a drop-in service at Ripley Town Hall and the Homelessness Prevention Project which works across six local authority areas in Derbyshire. Local Resilience Funding from Derbyshire County Council has enabled us to increase caseworker hours and run a weekly late evening call back session enabling us to reach more clients.

Local authorities including Chesterfield Borough Council, North East Derbyshire District Council and Bolsover District also help to support our Chesterfield Housing Possession Court Desk Scheme. This Scheme, which is predominantly funded by the Legal Aid Agency, ensures that one of our Solicitors is at Chesterfield County Court each Tuesday to provide representation for anyone that requires it.

In August 2023, the Legal Aid Agency renamed the County Court Desk Scheme contract to "Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service". The parameters of the contract also changed so that early intervention advice can be provided by our expert team prior to any possession hearing taking place; this can include advice on any issues with a client's welfare benefits.

Cases opened 2023 - 24



Homelessness Prevent Project

212

Homelessness preventions

146

Housing Repair Support Service

26

Cases closed

Rough Sleeper Support

4

Clients helped

County Court Duty Scheme

68

Households represented

A rise in mortgage cases has been seen at Court due to the sustained high level of interest rates by the Bank of England throughout late 2023 and to date in 2024. Our expertise both in the Housing Unit but more widely within the organisation allows us to often prevent possession orders being made thus keeping clients and their families in their homes.

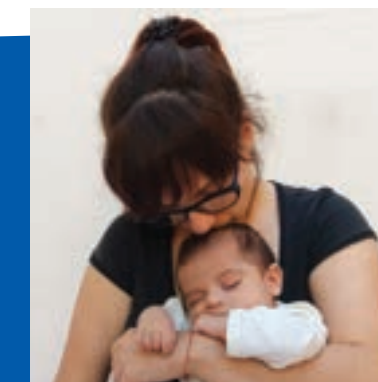
In addition to established projects and contracts, in 2024 we have also begun work with Ukrainian individuals and communities across Derbyshire to provide specialist housing and employment advice. This work is funded by Derbyshire County Council and is helping us to adapt our service delivery to provide interpreters; provide home visits and help Ukrainian Migrants understand their rights.

We aim to do all we can to make sure that Derbyshire residents are equipped with free and low cost legal advice that keeps them in secure housing.

We continue to work closely with partners, including local authorities, to ensure that we provide the best service possible to those throughout Derbyshire. Funding to our core services and individual projects, gives our Housing Unit the ability to work holistically to get the best possible outcomes for our clients at a time where they need specialist legal advice most.

"I was living in with my disabled son in a house that had bad damp problems. For weeks I couldn't use the electricity in the kitchen or living room because of the water running along the wires. The council did a fix but it didn't work and it was really affecting my mental health. I was really worried about my son. Stephen helped me speak to the council and find temporary accommodation."

Jenny, a Housing Repair Support Service client from Chesterfield



ANDIE'S STORY

Andie is a young woman of 19. She and her partner Ryan have a newborn baby.

They lived with her partner's granddad but unfortunately, he had

to go into a care home and the house they lived in was put up for sale. This left them at risk of being homeless and they were offered a property by a housing association but they needed to pay £620 up-front to secure the tenancy.

They could only manage to raise £120 and asked if we could help them with the rest, we obtained the remaining £500 from the Chesterfield General Charitable Fund and they moved into their new home within the week.

CELEBRATING THE HOUSING REPAIR SUPPORT SERVICE

At the start of 2024 we celebrated 2 years of the Housing Disrepair Support Service. The event brought together representatives from Councils in the local areas as well as Housing Law practitioners from private practice and other charities working in the Housing Industry.

The project is a primary example of the work we do in partnership with external organisations and is funded by Chesterfield Borough Council, Bolsover District Council and North East Derbyshire District Council.



In addition to helping clients directly, the project has also become a tool for combatting the rise in unscrupulous firms targeting low income households with 'no-win, no-fee' high compensation promises.

We have worked with the funding councils to design and distribute flyers in target areas to warn people of the risks of using these firms.

Celebrating 2 years of the Housing Repair Support Service



Disrepair, especially with health issues relating to damp, have been a key feature of news reports in 2024 which has led to an increase in the number of enquiries.

If clients choose to work with 'no-win, no-fee' claims farmers instead, they are often trapped in lengthy court proceedings with their social housing provider which increases costs for councils and often means the client is left with little compensation and a delay in their repair. It's estimated that each case that comes through Derbyshire Law Centre rather than a claims farmer saves local councils £5000 in legal costs.

Enquiries 2023 - 24

£25,344

in financial gains for clients

15 Cases opened

Cases closed

26

Specialist advice provided to **16** people

IMMIGRATION

The Immigration Unit at Derbyshire Law Centre is a vital service in the community. We help the people of Derbyshire reunite with family members, help them make Derbyshire their home and safe haven. We are committed to making Derbyshire a place where everyone has access to justice no matter where they came from.

The Law Centre, in collaboration with the Community Advice and Law Service in Leicester and other legal advice charities, successfully secured a grant from JTI to increase the number of immigration advisers in the East Midlands.

To achieve this, we have partnered with Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre (Shirebrook), St James Centre (Derby City), and North Derbyshire Refugee Support Group to provide supervision, training, and support for aspiring immigration advisers.

We have received special permission from the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) to allow these new advisers to undertake immigration casework as they work towards achieving OISC accreditation.

This project has significantly expanded the capacity of our Immigration Unit, enabling us to assist more people across the county. Currently, we have five caseworkers in training to become OISC-accredited advisers.

"One of the reasons I want to volunteer to give back to the Law Centre is because you helped me to sort out my mum's visa and immigration status. this meant I could spend the last few years with her before she died."

Tim, an Immigration Advice volunteer

LEGAL AID CONTRACT

In September 2023, Derbyshire Law Centre secured its first legal aid contract in 10 years. This contract enables us to provide vital legal support to asylum seekers, victims of trafficking, victims of domestic violence, and individuals facing appeals, among other cases.

The current shortage of legal aid provision, coupled with its limited commercial viability, has led many private legal aid providers to drop cases before handling appeals.

As a result, we have stepped in to take on a significant number of these appeal cases, ensuring that vulnerable individuals continue to receive the legal representation they need.

SERVICE DELIVERY

DISCRIMINATION

2023 - 2024 has been a busy and successful year for the Discrimination Unit. Our contract with the Legal Aid Agency was extended until August 2024, and we are both delighted and proud to confirm that we will continue to be able to provide specialist discrimination advice and support, after having been awarded a new legal aid contract to take effect from 1 September 2024.

CHLOE'S STORY

Chloe is a mum who is D/deaf. She contacted her daughter's mainstream school and asked for an interpreter to be provided so that she could attend an event at the school and take part like every other parent in attendance. However, the school refused and cited the expense of the interpreter.

Chloe emailed Derbyshire Law Centre for help at 9.30am. Derbyshire Law Centre emailed the school and outlined their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and by 3.30pm the school had agreed to pay for an interpreter. This meant that Chloe could participate in the event like every other parent and was not treated differently because of her disability.



ASHLEY'S STORY

Ashley is a young Dad with Autism. He came to Derbyshire Law Centre after being dismissed due to performance.

Derbyshire Law Centre advised that his employer had not

implemented reasonable adjustments or considered what could have been implemented before dismissing him.

Ashley instructed Derbyshire Law Centre to issue proceedings at the Employment Tribunal. The employer denied that Ashley was disabled and the matter had to be decided by a judge.

The Employer argued that Autism did not meet the definition of a disability under the Equality Act 2010 because Ashley has coping mechanisms for the symptoms of his Autism.

However, with the representation from Derbyshire Law Centre the judge decided that Ashley was disabled. After this decision the Employer made an offer to settle the claim which was accepted.

EMPLOYMENT

This year the Employment Unit has secured a staggering £354,901 for Derbyshire residents in financial gains through Settlements and Tribunal Judgements.

Legal Aid for the majority of Employment Law disputes was cut in 2013 and the unit relies on funding to provide free advice to local residents. However with Derbyshire County Council proposing to end its discretionary funding in 2025, the unit has looked to support its free specialist advice with low-cost charged for services. As cost is one of the largest barriers to accessing justice, we are committed to continuing to provide an affordable advice service especially during a cost-of-living crisis.

The unit has shown adaptability, resilience and initiative in these challenging times and remains optimistic for the future.

"Brilliant solicitors. Patrick who helped with my case was very helpful and always replies to your emails straight away. This guy knows his stuff"

Julie, an Employment Client from Buxton

HOW WE HELPED SAMANTHA

Samantha contacted the Law Centre after her employer of 20 years shut down her place of work without warning. Samantha discovered that her boss was trying to shut the company down without paying her, so she contacted the Law Centre for assistance.

In an initial call we advised Samantha that she was entitled to notice pay, outstanding wages and unless her employer dismissed her properly that she would be entitled to make a claim for unfair dismissal.

We provided a letter of advice regarding her case and immediately applied to halt the legal action to close the company, which could have resulted in Samantha being left without any legal recourse.

On Samantha's behalf we applied to ACAS for Early Conciliation and when this was unsuccessful, assisted her with making a claim to the employment tribunal.

Because of the exceptional nature of Samantha's case, we represented her at the Employment Tribunal and were successful in securing her a Tribunal Award in excess of £40,000.

VISIBILITY AND PRESENCE

STRATEGIC AIM

Throughout the last year we have run a programme of activities and campaigns to raise awareness of the rights and remedies available to communities and individuals. This has involved a range outreach work, user involvement, publicity and promotional work.

THE BARING FOUNDATION PROJECT

Thanks to funding from the Barings Foundation, we employed a Community Outreach Worker last October to launch this project which runs until March 2026. Our aim is to use the law to make services accessible in Derbyshire.

By running drop-in and training sessions and providing easy to access information for Disability Discrimination on our website we are empowering, providing knowledge and understanding to service users and providers of their disability discrimination rights.

Having space and time to understand the impact of issues and what help is required to make a difference without always having to litigate is proving to be a powerful tool and is what lies at the heart of this project.

Discrimination Training with Aera Support in Alfreton



We have focused our efforts on engaging with partner organisations and communities impacted by disability to identify key areas for change and liaise with external companies and service providers.

1 in 5

Derbyshire residents has a disability that places some limitation on their day-to-day activities



RAIL TRAVEL FOR EVERYONE

Our accessible rail travel for everyone campaign, the focus of which is Step free access, tactile paving, accessible toilets and passenger assist is to ensure rail companies / Network Rail:

- Put sufficient training and staffing in place for passenger assist to incorporate mandatory CPD training every 12 months
- Put realistic dates and funding in place for step free access
- Have sufficient accessible toilets at stations

DWP DISCRIMINATION

Our DWP discrimination campaign aims, through working with our partners and a collaborative approach with Law Centres, to create changes in policies and training to eliminate discrimination within the DWP.

We are part of the LCN DWP discrimination group and working with LCN, Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre, Deaf-initely Women and Derbyshire Sight loss council to gain lived experiences and support.

WORKING WITH COUNCILS

We have identified issues of accessing services within councils, we are developing contacts to work together with the councils and partners to create easily accessible services that meet the clients' needs and rights.

SUPPORTING THE DEAF COMMUNITY IN DERBYSHIRE

We are looking at accessible services for the Deaf community in Derbyshire, with our focus being to improve/increase accessible services for our Deaf community within Derbyshire.



It is estimated that

149,500

people in Derbyshire have hearing loss out of 9.2 million people across England

We have held

17

drop-in and training sessions with the local community

We are working with

55

charities, support groups and services to raise awareness

We have supported

3

deaf clients to access services through legal recourse, including Chloe on page 14

VISIBILITY AND PRESENCE

RAISING AWARENESS IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Our team have been hard at work this year raising the profile of the Derbyshire Law Centre in the local community and with the local legal industry.

From fundraising 10k runs to winning the Sheffield and District's Law Society's 'Legal Aid Firm of the Year' we have built connections and increased our visibility.



Attending the May Day Gala 2024



Fundraising in the Chesterfield 10k

THE MAYOR'S CHARITIES

This year we were fortunate to be selected as one of the three Mayor's Charities in Chesterfield. We were chosen alongside Rural Action Derbyshire and Chesterfield Royal to help raise funds and awareness of the contribution each charity makes to the lives of local people. As a result we have been working closely with the Mayor Jenny Flood and Mayoress Heather Hopkinson and attending events to share the work that we do.

Attending events across the County allows us to engage with different communities and strengthen relationships. Funding cuts are being made to charities and organisations in the voluntary and services sector and it is more vital than ever that we continue to work in partnership to offer a collaborative service to clients.

Events we have attended include Chesterfield Pride, ThinkFest, DVA 'Stop the Cuts' campaigns, the May Day Gala and a variety of local charity and community organisation events.

WORKSHOPS FOR LOCAL CASEWORKERS



This summer we offered a free workshop for MP caseworkers and anyone working in social welfare. This pilot was the start of a series of workshops which are held remotely, are free to attend and are an hour long. They offer a bite-size introduction to the legal challenges people face every day and the work that we do to bring them justice.

Recordings of each session are available for attendees to share with their colleagues to help us build our referral network.

"The presentation was extremely useful. I wasn't fully aware of all your services and I will refer clients when appropriate now"

MP Caseworker from Derbyshire

FREE LEGAL ADVICE DROP-INS

During 2024 we have run a series of Drop-In sessions across the Chesterfield in specific areas of deprivation. The project is funded through a Chesterfield Borough Council Community Grant and helps us to make accessing our services easier for those who are more isolated in the community.

The project allows us to host drop-ins at community centres and food banks including Gussie's Kitchen, Barrow Hill and Loundsley Green. It has also funded a series of social media and local magazine promotions that have reached over 15,000 in the region, driving website traffic, enquiries and overall awareness of the Derbyshire Law Centre with nearby residents.

The Community Drop-In project runs alongside other drop-in clinics run by the housing and homelessness prevention teams in Bolsover and Ripley.

These activities have helped raise awareness and enable us to increase our audience, increase our clients, and share our successes. In the future we will continue to focus on achieving our five overarching aims of awareness, education, referral, accessibility and fundraising.



PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

STRATEGIC AIM

Partnership working is, and always has been, fundamental to our work. We work closely with local authorities, external agencies and organisations in our community to increase access to justice for those in need as well as helping our partners to achieve their objectives. Working together in partnership has enabled us to increase our funding and the number of services we can deliver.

Through our partners we have been able to identify need, working with new clients who may not have been able to access our service, and by pooling resources we are able to maximise both our own resources and those of our partners, of vital importance during these challenging times.

We have continued our partnerships with: Gussie's Kitchen, Pathways and Ingeus as well as a critical group of local authorities. We have forged new links with: Reed in Partnership, The Haven in Barrow Hill and Loundsley Green Community Centre.

We have also continued to contribute to local organisations through membership on their Boards. These include: Derbyshire Voluntary Action, The Elm Foundation, Citizens Advice Derbyshire Districts; Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre and Links CVS.

CPD IN HOUSING LAW

This year we have continued our work with the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Housing Law Group which brings legal practitioners together to hear from leading professionals in the industry.

In November 2023 we hosted the Housing Law Conference which was attended by private practice, charity and government members as well as our own Housing Unit to provide continued professional development.

The event is running again in 2024 and is supported by Trinity Chambers.



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

We would like to extend our thanks to our funders and partner organisations that have helped maintain a thriving and essential service for the disadvantaged residents of Derbyshire.

- AB Charitable Trust
- EMMA partnership
- Leicester Community Advice and Law Centre
- Access to Justice Foundation
- Allen and Overy Foundation
- Amber Valley Borough Council
- British Deaf Association
- Derbyshire County Council
- Chesterfield Borough Council
- North East Derbyshire District Council
- Bolsover District Council
- Derbyshire Dales District Council
- Erewash Borough Council
- High Peak Borough Council
- The Home Office
- Institute of Money Advisers
- Law Centres Network
- Legal Aid Agency
- Ministry of Justice
- The National Lottery Community Fund, via
- Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- Nottingham Law Centre
- The Baring Foundation
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- Money and Pension Service



CULTURE AND PEOPLE

STRATEGIC AIM

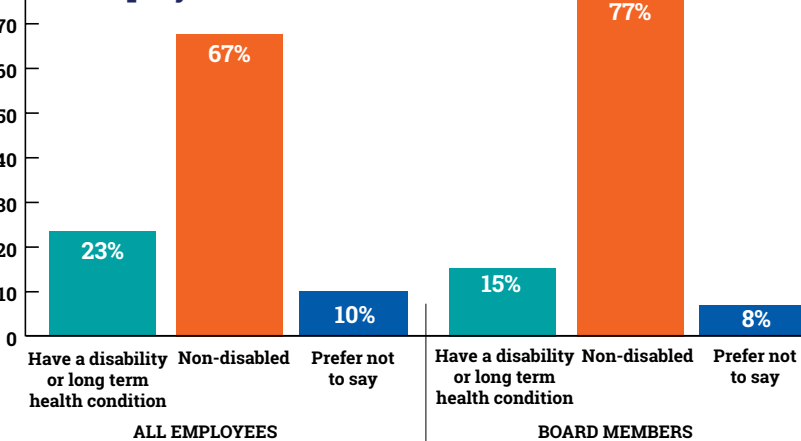
Looking after the wellbeing of our staff and volunteers is important to us. We recognise that having a healthy workforce improves engagement of our people and helps to create a positive working environment. We want everyone to feel supported and believe that this enables us to deliver the best service possible to support our clients.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

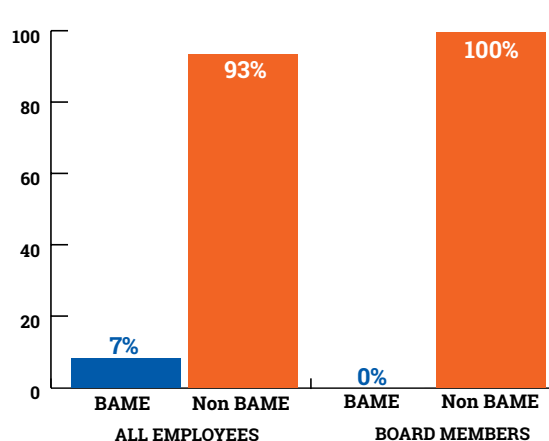
As part of our commitment to EDI we have updated our mandatory training for all staff and volunteers. Thanks to funding from Access to Justice Foundation we are looking at how we engage with marginalised communities.

Our work with The Baring Foundation has also enabled us to make meaningful connections with a number of local groups. We have reinforced our commitment to Disability Inclusion with our plans to become Disability Confident Level 3 accredited.

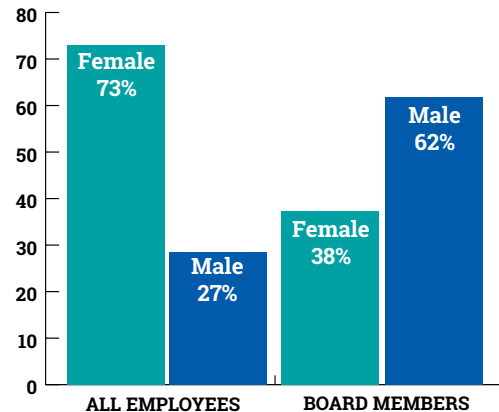
Disability or long term health condition of employees and board members



Ethnicity of employees and board members



Gender of employees and board members



Age range of employees and board members

Age	Age range of our Employees	Age range of the Board
under 25 yrs	13%	0%
26 - 35 yrs	33%	23%
36 - 45 yrs	17%	0%
46 - 55 yrs	10%	0%
56 - 65 yrs	27%	31%
66 - 75 yrs	0%	23%
75+ yrs	0%	23%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%

RECOGNISING AND REWARDING OUR PEOPLE

Recognising the importance of People and Culture has led us to evaluate our needs, hopes and aspirations in this area. In the last twelve months we have made some improvements including the recruitment of a dedicated HR co-ordinator, trained in mental health first aid, enhancing our team of trained mental first aiders and reinforcing our commitment to this area. We are already seeing the benefits of this with a number of new initiatives.

Recruiting, retaining and rewarding our staff is crucial to ensuring Derbyshire Law Centre's future sustainability and success. We have also introduced recognition of length of service and an additional two paid days off during the Christmas period.

RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

A particular challenge at the moment across the sector is the shortage of suitable qualified people, and, in particular, those that want to work in social welfare law. As well as the work we are doing to train paralegals and future solicitors in-house, we have also revised the way we recruit.

By implementing the STAR approach, we are able to gather real-life examples of past behaviour to understand a candidate's skill set beyond their resume.

The method also helps us curate a positive interview experience for candidates, showing them that we care about their experience beyond the list of accomplishments on their application form.

Our new transparent recruitment process aims to make the application process as simple and user friendly as possible. We believe that sharing the questions with candidates prior to interview reduces stress and anxiety. We have developed a new recruitment pack which aims to give candidates as much information and guidance as possible.

We aim to continuously review our recruitment methods to build trust and support from the initial engagement and to showcase the benefits of working at Derbyshire Law Centre.



Business Planning Day March 2024

CULTURE AND PEOPLE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Our collective structure is something we are really proud of, but we recognise that as we grow this places challenges on the decision-making process.

With the help of external support, we are reviewing the Law Centre's leadership and governance. All staff have been involved and we have already started work to improve the clarity of our decision-making process with new delegation of authority documents and new terms of reference for sub-committees.

Work on our Articles of Association continues to ensure that the document is fit for purpose, up-to-date and user friendly. We are confident that by doing this work we will be able to implement changes to ensure our future sustainability.

OFFICE MOVE

One of our aims this year was to come together as a team under one roof, having been based in two offices since September 2019. We are really pleased that this move is going ahead and from the end of October we will be back together at number 1 Rose Hill East.



'Wear It Green' Day for Mental Health awareness

WELLBEING EVENTS

We are proud of the support we are able to offer to staff, volunteers and trustees. As well as internal support systems and three mental health first aiders we also have external support through the Employee Assistance Programme, thanks to the Law Centres Network.

Throughout the year we celebrate and recognise a number of national health awareness days which see staff coming together to talk, raise money and focus on their own wellbeing.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

We are proud of what we have achieved but we recognise that there is so much more to do which is why People and Culture will continue to be a priority for us and why we have committed to creating a People and Culture Strategy. This will set out clearly what we want to achieve to ensure that our people continue to feel valued and to thrive, enabling them to deliver the service we are so proud of, and which enables us to unlock justice and make a difference to the lives of so many Derbyshire residents.

SUPPORTING OUR TRAINEE SOLICITORS



Madison and Kate

We recognise the important role we play in ensuring the future of social welfare law and the continued success of Derbyshire Law Centre. This year two more of our colleagues, Madison and Kate, were successfully awarded Training Contracts to become solicitors. We look forward to helping them develop into qualified solicitors in December 2025 and to welcoming a new trainee in April 2025.



I am in my first seat in my training contract in the Housing Unit and I have thoroughly enjoyed learning more about Housing law as previously I was a paralegal on the Homelessness Prevention Project. I have had the opportunity to represent clients at Chesterfield County Court, allowing me to gain some advocacy experience. I have appointments with clients at Ripley Town Hall which allows me to work closely with Amber Valley Borough Council to ensure the best outcome for the client.

I am looking forward to moving into other units at the Law Centre such as the Debt and Employment unit to get experience of other aspects of social welfare law.

Madison, a DLC Trainee Solicitor



I am currently part way through my seat in the Immigration Unit, having spent six months in Debt Unit, then will finish with a year in the Housing Unit. I have completed the Immigration and Asylum Accreditation: Trainee Casework Assistant and hope to gain the OISC Level 1 accreditation which will allow me to work on more complex cases. Now I have completed the Legal Practice Course I am glad to be able to focus on my training contract.

I feel fortunate to have been offered a training contract at the Law Centre as I want to work in social welfare law/civil legal aid in the future. My training contract is part funded by the MoJ's Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service and I am looking forward to getting experience advocating for clients under the County Court Duty Scheme next year.

Kate, a DLC Trainee Solicitor



CULTURE AND PEOPLE

THE TEAM



Sue Allard
Second Solicitor



Madison Aspinall
Trainee Solicitor



Helen Bagley
Co-ordinator
(Strategic Lead)



Millie Barlow
Communications
Worker



Chloe Bloor
Paralegal
(Homelessness
Prevention)



Matthew Brown
Solicitor
(Housing)



Richard Carter
Administrator
(Reception)



Sharon Challands
Co-ordinator
(Financial Lead, Office
and Resources)



Jane Clarence
Administrator
(Caseworker Support)



Liz Clarke
Administrator
(Reception)



Vanessa Edwards
Assessment
Supervisor



Mae Elsmore-Renshaw
Caseworker
(Immigration)



Tom Fletcher
Caseworker
(Employment)



Kyle Gudgeon
Finance Apprentice



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)



Hayley Lawes
Co-ordinator
(Human Resources)



Patrick Macken
Solicitor
(Employment)



Kate Morgan
Trainee Solicitor



Stephen Oliver
Solicitor
(Housing)



Sally Preece
Caseworker
(Debt)



Rachael Priest
Co-ordinator (Charity
Development,
Fundraising and
Impact)



Sagar Shah
Solicitor
(Immigration)



Shauna Snelling
Paralegal
(Homelessness
Prevention)



Gary Steel
Solicitor
(Employment &
Discrimination)



Nikki Tugby
Co-ordinator
(Service Delivery)



Kev Weston
Paralegal
(Homelessness
Prevention)



Codie Whitworth
Paralegal
(Housing)



Jessica Wright
Finance Assistant

VOLUNTEERS

The Law Centre's volunteering project, Step Into Work, has just reached the end of its first year. This 4-year project is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and aims to provide a supportive environment for individuals looking to move into paid work but for whom a traditional work environment may not be suitable.

So far we have received over 70 applications from local people, and from these we currently have 20 volunteers recruited, trained and actively volunteering within our service.

In the next 12 months we hope to build on our successes by:

- Recruiting and retaining more volunteers with disabilities, and long term health conditions
- Upskilling longer-term volunteers to enable them to support with recruitment, induction and training of new starters.
- Celebrating the strengths, contributions and diversity of our wonderful volunteers

"The Debt Unit have benefited from our new debt volunteer, Lily: she has been a great help in making those phone calls we just can't find time for, drafting debt relief applications on the portal, chasing clients, and all together making our lives that bit easier. Thanks Lily!"

Sue Allard, Solicitor in the Debt Unit



Celebrating National Volunteers Week 2024

"It has been such an important part of my journey into law and has opened up job opportunities for me I might not have had if I hadn't started volunteering. I recommend it to anyone, particularly those looking to pursue a career in law."

Jamie, an Assessment Volunteer



100%

of volunteers would recommend volunteering with us

CULTURE AND PEOPLE

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGY

Derbyshire Law Centre is a registered charity, limited by guarantee. A Board of Trustees governs the Charity. Trustees are also Directors of the company and collectively constitute the Board, which is responsible for ensuring that the organisation is effectively managed and well led and for:

- Setting strategy
- Ensuring the necessary financial, human and physical assets are available to meet the strategic aims
- Monitoring performance
- Overseeing risk management
- Setting the Charity's values
- Ensuring public benefit and adherence to its charitable purpose is at the heart of everything it does
- Supporting and advising the collective management team

The Board is currently reviewing leadership and management to ensure that decision making at all levels enable us to meet our strategic aims. Considering ongoing financial pressures and the economic environment the Board is also mindful of ensuring long-term sustainability to enable us to continue to provide public benefit long into the future.

Table of Trustees	
Rob Busby - Vice Chair	Individual member
John Duncan	Individual member
Councillor Jenny Flood - Chair	Chesterfield Borough Council
Councillor Duncan McGregor	Bolsover District Council
Councillor Kathy Rouse	North East Derbyshire District Council
David Shaw	Individual member
Robert Southwell - co-opted member	Citizens Advice – Derbyshire Districts
Martin Stone	Chesterfield Labour Party
Elaine Tidd	Individual member
Angela Webster	Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre
Councillor Mick Wilson - Secretary	Ripley Town Council
Sarah White - Treasurer	Individual Member
Councillor Jack Woolley	Derbyshire County Council

We currently have 12 members and 1 co-opted member.

Between 1st September 2023 and 31st August 2024 the Board of Trustees met 13 times, with a comprehensive schedule of work, focused on:

- The long term strategy of the charity
- Reviewing new opportunities to enhance the charity’s public benefit
- Reviewing the charity’s governance, leadership and management structure
- Reviewing the charity’s pay structures
- Guiding the charity’s response to external factors

MEMBERS

As a registered charity, and a company limited by guarantee we also have members who act as nominal guarantors, with liability limited to £1 if the company should ever be wound up. Members are entitled to vote at the AGM, where accounts are approved, and Trustees are elected. Current membership includes former employees and Trustees, and supporters of the Charity and its objectives. The Board will be looking to review its communication with members in the coming months.

"I joined the trustees of the Derbyshire Law Centre very recently. I have been an admirer of the organisation for a very long time. They provide legal and advisory support across a range of areas that would otherwise be beyond the reach of most people. I am particularly keen to support the work focusing on employment rights and housing issues where some of the most vulnerable in our communities need the most support."

Martin Stone, Board Member

MRS BEVERLEY POWELL MBE 1945 - 2024



Mrs Beverley Powell was born in Troy Trelawney, Jamaica. However, in the 1960's she came to England and made Chesterfield her home. She worked as a care worker in the community and was a founder member of the African and Caribbean Community Association. She received an MBE for her community work.

As a representative of ACCA, she was Vice Chair of the then Chesterfield Law Centre in 1988 and then went on to become our Chair from December 1989 until November 2009. She continued her role as Trustee until 2012. We are eternally grateful for the time and energy that Beverley gave to the fight for justice for the people of Chesterfield.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

STRATEGIC AIM

The financial year to March 24 achieved a surplus of £77,232, with unrestricted reserves increasing to £439,122.

Through a mixture of funders, a good level of reserves, excellent financial procedures and financial management, we have been confident in confirming Derbyshire Law Centre as a “Going Concern”. Our cashflow is good and we meet our minimum level of reserves. Our diverse portfolio of funding has allowed us to secure funds with over 20 different funders and partnerships.

There was excellent news from the National Lottery Community Fund, which confirmed funding for our volunteers’ project for the next 4 years. We were successful in obtaining a new immigration legal aid contract, alongside our existing housing and debt and discrimination contracts. The County Court Duty Scheme contract was replaced with the new Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service (HLPAS) contract. All existing contracts were extended until August 2024, and we have already secured new contracts from September 24.

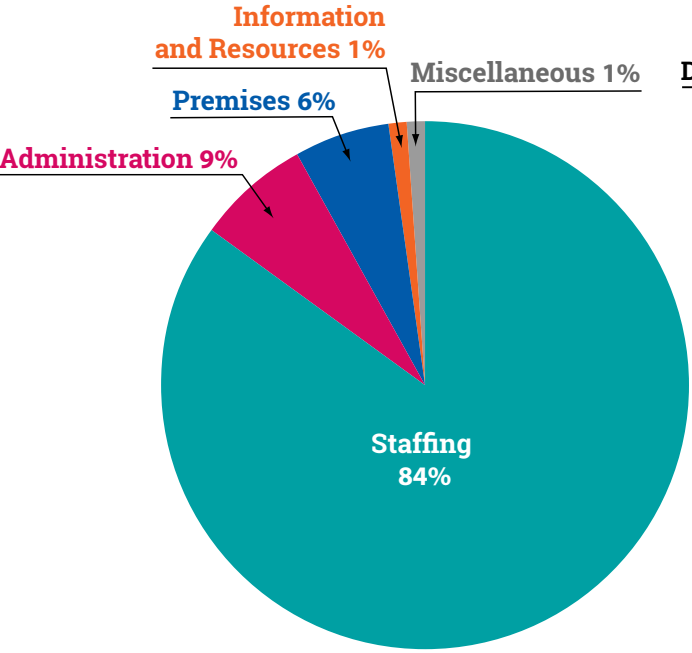
However, all this success cannot leave us complacent. 2024/25 is likely to be a difficult year and one where our reserves will be used. As with other charities, the recent cost of living increases has seen increased expenditure, without necessarily, the corresponding funds. In salaries alone, we are expecting an increase of 20% compared to 23/24.

Our comprehensive funding strategy is working well and during the year, we were able to secure 9 new funds for projects, services and trainee solicitors in 2023/24. Since April 23, to date, we have raised a total of over £1.27m to be spent over 5 years. Most of this is restricted funding.

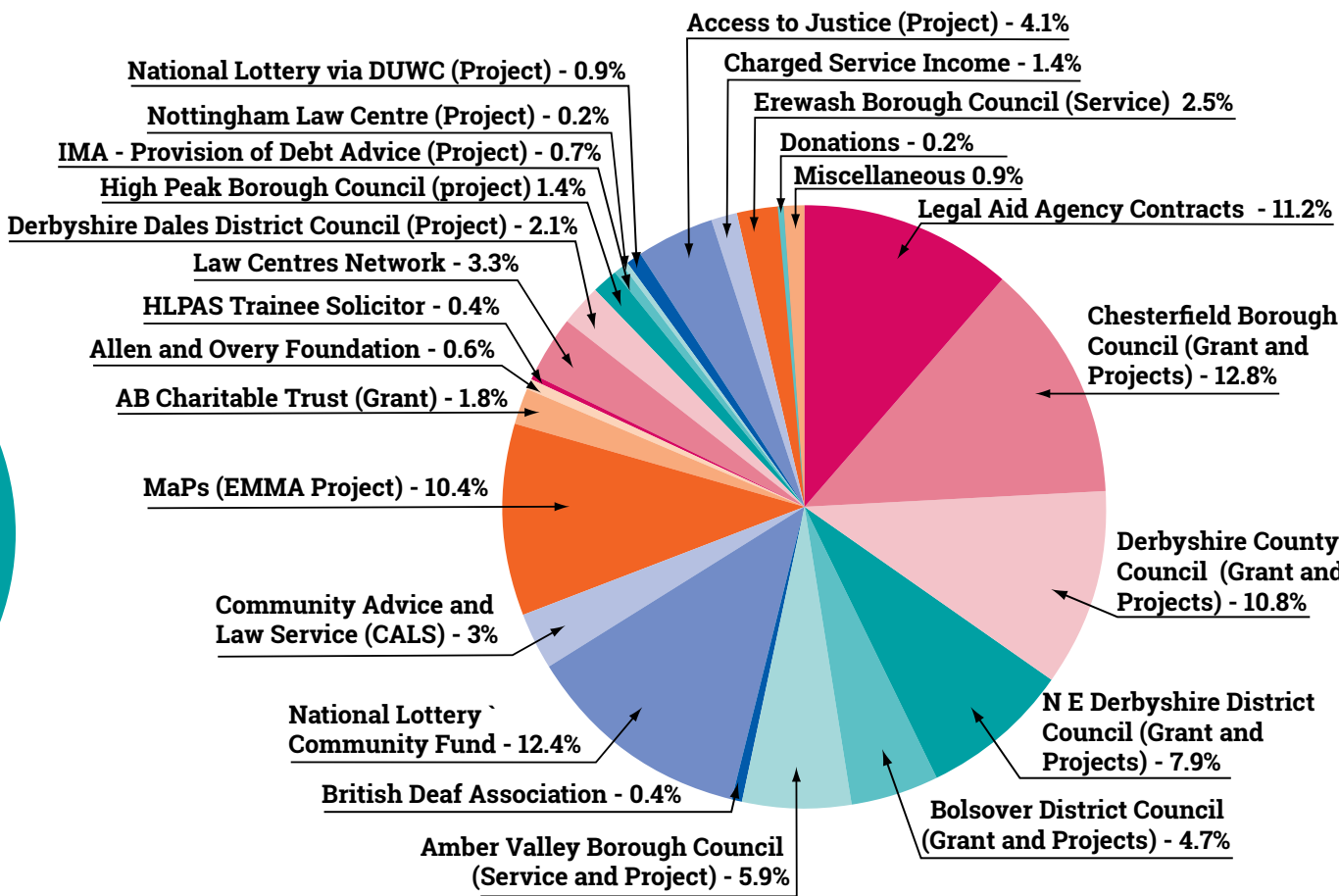
Core funding remains a priority. Whilst we can achieve some of this through our contract work with the Legal Aid Agency, we rely heavily on Local Authority core funding. Core funds from local authorities are increasingly insecure (with Chesterfield Borough Council reducing core support by 50% and Derbyshire County Council consulting on withdrawing all their core funds in 24/25). We have worked and will continue to work closely with Chesterfield Borough Council, Derbyshire County Council, North East Derbyshire District Council and Bolsover District Council to encourage continuation of core funds, which, in turn, enables us to attract funding from other sources.

Following the loss of some of the funding for our employment service, we have concentrated more on our charged for service, mainly dealing with Settlement Agreements, although this income is still very small.

TOTAL EXPENDITURE 2023 - 2024



TOTAL INCOME 2023 - 2024



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 2023-24 accounts please see www.derbyshirelawcentre.org.uk/about-us where you will find a full copy of the audited accounts.

CONTACT US

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

We have appointments available in offices throughout Derbyshire.

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

Text: 07781 482826

Textphone for deaf people: 18001 01246 550674

 **@derbyshirelawcentre**

 **Derbyshirelawcentre**

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.

