

North Kensington Law Centre

Annual Report and Trustees' Report

1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025



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1) Chair's Foreword



Zarif Khan

'As we all await in anticipation of a new budget it is clear that whichever party is in power, the voluntary sector is left further behind each year and relying increasingly on outside funders. Yet the motto of NKLC since its inception has not moved a dial. Arguably in a class of increasing billionaires it only resonates more now than since 1970 to relieve poor persons, resident or working in the benefit area by providing such person with legal services which they could not otherwise obtain through lack of means and the advancement of education among persons, residents or working in the benefit area'.

NKLC has survived despite the many challenges over its 55-year history. It is a beacon for residents of North Kensington who rely on its open-door policy servicing the diaspora of a world community. Who would have said 55 years ago that the richest few would have the largest concentration of wealth, yet a polarisation of those not so well off would be attacked from the extremes of the political spectrum.

Despite that maybe the winds of changes are coming, and all humanity lives on hope and that hope appears to be rising from across the Atlantic. Recent events, both nationally and internationally have shown that a living wage and the needs of the less privileged do resonate and can garner support when increasing numbers are having less of a stake in society. It is evidence that appealing to decency and our common humanity does matter if the right messages are projected, giving not just hope but real change. This is part of what makes a successful and progressive society for all. At the heart of that lies justice in all formats for those who cannot access basic legal services but have inalienable right to do so. NKLC continues to play its important part, towards that justice for all.

NKLC is still picking up the threads of the historical impact and cases resulting from the Pandemic, Grenfell, and Windrush which are issues affecting those most vulnerable in our society and in our local community of North Kensington. The ones in need require access to specialist needs and NKLC is an innovative organisation which is offering its services without prejudice or fear or favour to anyone who walks through its doors. NKLC has had to move with the times and be adaptable to technology, but the face-to-face meetings remain a key part of our service to address our clients' everyday needs. Not everyone is comfortable with Zoom or sadly have access to the internet even in 2025; digital exclusion remains a challenge.

NKLC is the lead partner charity provider together with our colleagues at Ealing Law Centre, the fourth year running for The Rough Sleepers Project supported by London Councils. The responsibility involves outreach work in having a worker at various locations and despite its challenges, NKLC remains committed to making it a success. There is not enough space in this introduction to champion the successful and positive work undertaken by NKLC in this or other projects. But many who were lost, unaccounted or simply frightened by the hostile environment, are now being offered real help, out of homelessness back into the system where they can get most of their needs seen to, from accommodation to benefits.

Likewise, NKLC manages with the many struggles with the Home Office in relation to the Windrush Schemes as well as Grenfell support, despite the difficult environment surrounding both topics.

Franck KIANGALA our NKLC Director remains the saviour since he took over. Now many years into his role but the immense tasks never daunt him, and he excels in his post and finds funding from a wishing well of organisations. To all those organisations and donors, we extend our gratitude and their continuing support. Without Franck's commitment, hard work and tenacity, it is no exaggeration to say that NKLC would not survive. Each year we urge Franck to take a holiday but his dedication to his work is unfathomable, we suspect he may be saving up days, so that he can retire years early!

Like all excellent organisations, NKLC is supported by dedicated and hardworking staff members, who despite some incredibly challenging moments every day remain steadfast, committed and an example to all of us. I, together with the Trustees extend our heartfelt gratitude to each one of them.

The superlatives are endless but in short, we are thankful to them because they remain loyal to a sector which is wholly underappreciated and underfunded and yet essential to the very vulnerable in our society. The simple fact is they do not do this for money alone, but for the good of helping people. That's what the charity / voluntary sector is about, and they are the real heroes of NKLC.

The Law Centre was started with the vision of Peter KANDLER and over the years many good spirited individuals, supported him in management. Like him, I am also indebted to my fellow Trustees who each month give up their time voluntarily to oversee the management of NKLC and their devotion and enthusiasm to do good is not unnoticed. I am grateful to them all.

NKLC remains devoted in its founding pledge, and we are thankful of all your support both morally, financially and all the others way that you are there for us. We believe in the community and working together to achieve the objectives as set in 1970 for a better society.

I commend this report to you and thank you for attending today and supporting us.'

2) Director's Report

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) is known for stark contrasts between wealth and deprivation. Despite significant affluence, many residents live in poverty and face complex barriers to stability and opportunity. North Kensington Law Centre (NKLC) has continued to respond to these challenges through specialist, high-quality legal services that prevent homelessness, protect livelihoods, secure status, and maximise incomes for those most at risk.

Key drivers of local hardship include: a high cost of living, widening income inequality, a shortage of genuinely affordable housing, and persistent educational and employment disparities. These factors, compounded by the long-term social impact of the Grenfell Tower fire and the economic aftershocks of the pandemic, continue to create acute need across our community. The rising cost of living—especially rent and energy—has deepened this hardship and increased demand for our services.

In this context, our role as a community-anchored yet pan-London legal service remains essential. Our specialist advice and representation directly tackle destitution and inequality. We are particularly proud of the Welfare Benefits Unit, whose casework delivers life-changing income gains to clients through successful appeals and benefit maximisation.

***Income gains through Welfare Benefits:** £912,805.31 (cumulative), including £447,566.71 achieved **this year**.*

As demand grows and complexity increases, we have strengthened triage, supervision, and cross-unit working. We also continue to invest in staff development and pathways into social welfare law, including apprenticeships and training contracts, to sustain the movement founded here in 1970.

3) Objectives and Activities

Charitable objects (Articles of Association, amended 11 July 2016):

- To relieve poor persons resident or working in the Benefit Area by providing legal services that they could not otherwise obtain due to lack of means.
- The advancement of education for persons resident or working in the Benefit Area.
- The advancement of any charitable purposes beneficial to the community for persons resident or working in the Benefit Area.

Benefit Area: Greater London or elsewhere in the United Kingdom as determined by the Charity from time to time.

4) Significant Activities & Areas of Work

Our principal activity is the provision of legal advice and representation to people living or working in Greater London, with priority for those who live, work, or have a connection with RBKC. Our principal areas are:

- ****Housing****
- ****Immigration & Asylum**** (including Legal Aid-funded cases where eligible and in scope)
- ****Welfare Benefits****
- ****Employment**** (non-Legal Aid)

We also advise and represent Windrush cohort members in both documentation and compensation claims.

Quality & standards: NKLC holds the Lexcel Quality Mark across practice areas, is an Accredited Living Wage and London Living Wage employer (member of the Living Wage Foundation), and holds the Cyber Essentials quality mark.

5) Impact Snapshot (2024–25)

Service reach and volume (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025):

- ****People assisted:**** 1,263
- ****Matters opened:**** 1,352
- ****Year-on-year change in matters:**** +70%

Matters by unit:

Unit	Clients	Cases
Employment	128	130
Housing	283	291
Immigration & Asylum	670	697
Welfare Benefits	182	234
Total	**1,263**	**1,352**

These figures reflect sustained demand and increased complexity across all areas, with immigration/asylum and housing continuing to account for the largest volumes.

6) Service Reports

A) Welfare Benefits Unit

Lead: Adrian Cooper, Senior Welfare Benefits Adviser & Supervisor Headline impact: Significant income maximisation for vulnerable clients; successful challenges to overpayments; prevention of destitution and homelessness through restored entitlements.



Case study 1

Overpayment overturned; entitlement restored

Our client faced alleged overpayments totaling £43,680.27 (Housing Benefit £25,268.27 and ESA £18,412) and had been without Housing Benefit and ESA for approximately 18 months.

Following a detailed forensic analysis of hundreds of bank statements and a carefully prepared schedule, both the DWP and Housing Benefit conceded at the First-tier Tribunal. The client received £25,065 in backdated benefits and avoided criminal prosecution for alleged fraud. The outcome alleviated severe financial and mental distress and protected ongoing entitlement.

Case study 2

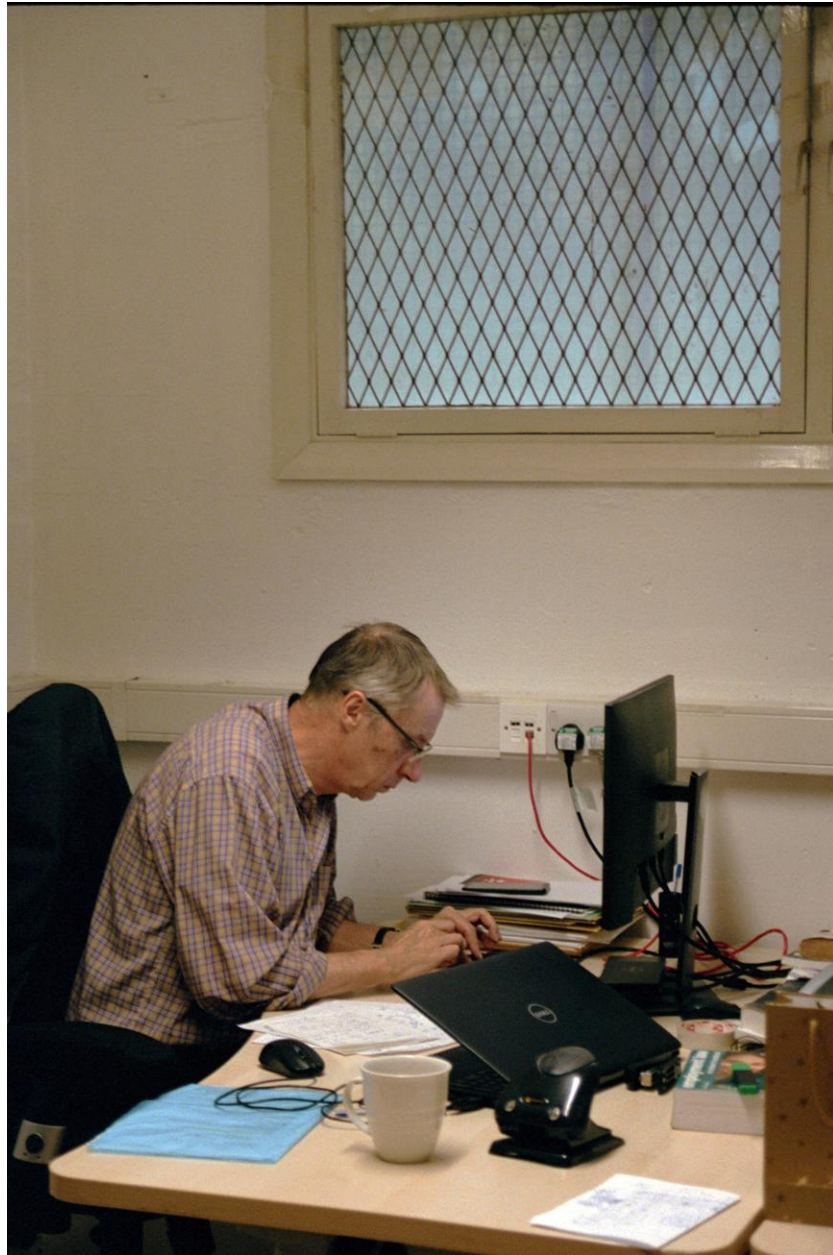
Voluntary payments not income; multiple decisions set aside - *Mr. B* faced alleged overpayments of £58,295 relating to *Income Support* and *ESA*. We showed that sporadic funds received were voluntary payments and monies held on trust, not income. Allegations of capital abroad were rebutted. With additional grant funding enabling intensive casework, we secured a life-changing outcome and later succeeded in linked challenges, including *Housing Benefit* (£52,820) and *PIP* (£37,114) decisions.



B) Employment Unit

Lead: Barry Mills

Team: Barry Mills (Senior Employment Caseworker & Supervisor) and Shirl Wong (Solicitor)
Focus: Fair work, health & safety, discrimination, unfair dismissal, settlement



negotiations; empowering workers to understand and assert their rights.

Local labour market context (high-level): Kensington & Chelsea’s employment rate fell in the year ending December 2023, with 60.6% of residents aged 16–64 in employment; 5.9% unemployment (16+); and 35.7% economically inactive among 16–64 year-olds. These trends underscore the need for robust employment advice and early intervention.

Case study 1

Unfair dismissal & sexual harassment - *“P” was dismissed shortly after raising concerns about harassment from a colleague with whom he had previously been in a relationship. After reviewing extensive message evidence and advising on Equality Act claims and process, we supported Early Conciliation. The matter settled via ACAS for £7,500, avoiding lengthy proceedings and enabling closure.*

Case study 2

Disability discrimination (ASD) & harassment - *“J” an employee of a large tech firm, faced disadvantage due to performance processes that failed to account for agreed adjustments. We advised on reasonable adjustments and Equality Act claims (including PCPs), time limits, and remedies. She re-engaged her union with our written analysis and is now supported through a Tribunal application.*

Case study 3

Unfair dismissal for a genuine mistake - *“E” with four years’ service in care administration, was dismissed for alleged gross misconduct following a minor addressing error. We advised on proportionality and training gaps, led Early Conciliation via ACAS, and secured a £9,000 settlement covering losses and avoiding the stress of litigation.*

C) Housing Unit

Lead: Thalatha Wickramasinghe, Senior Supervising Solicitor

Team: Joined this year by Alero Hart (Trainee Solicitor). Focus: Preventing evictions and homelessness, challenging unlawful decisions, improving conditions, addressing disrepair.



Context: Rising rents and frozen Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates have widened the affordability gap. Families who could previously manage are now unable to meet rising housing costs, increasing the risk of arrears, possession, and homelessness.

Case study – *Disrepair counterclaim transforms outcome* “Mr A,” a vulnerable 65-year-old with £8,000 rent arrears reduced to £6,000, faced possession proceedings. On the day of a listed possession hearing, disrepair (including sewage leaks) was disclosed for the first time. The court granted leave to counterclaim. With expert evidence obtained, the case settled for £17,000: arrears were set-off and the client received £11,000 net—providing stability and



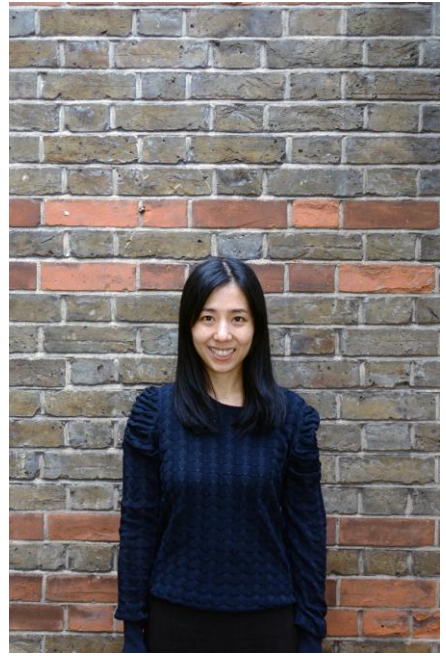
dignity after years of hardship.

D) Immigration & Asylum Unit



Leads: Franck Kiangala & Cassim Yacoobali

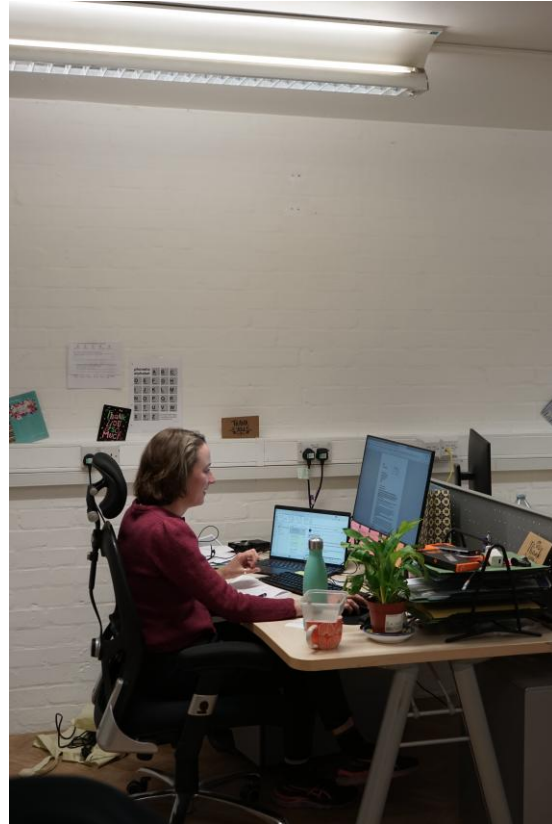
Team: Cassim Yacoobali (Senior Supervising Solicitor), Shilpa Caute (Solicitor, Senior Caseworker), Piret Akkerman (Senior Caseworker), Emmy Todd (Senior Caseworker), Franck Kiangala (Director & Solicitor, Supervisor), Shirl Wong (Solicitor – transitioned part-time to Employment in July 2024), Emma Louise Livesey (Solicitor – Immigration Project Officer).



Context: Policy and procedural barriers have intensified, with prolonged delays, increased complexity, and higher risks for vulnerable applicants. Against this backdrop, our team has secured safety, stability, and family unity through expert representation.

Case study 1 – *Trafficking survivor granted refugee status “RD,” a survivor from Kosovo, and her daughter presented with severe trauma (RD diagnosed with PTSD). We obtained a positive trafficking decision from the Single Competent Authority and successfully represented both in their asylum claims. Recognition as refugees ended the risk of return and enabled RD and her daughter to rebuild their lives in safety.*

Case study 2 – *Long-residence, Windrush-linked vulnerability, Jamaican national brought to the UK at age 10 entered care shortly after arrival. Without regularised status for years, she later formed a family with British children. In 2019, we secured leave to remain under Appendix FM and the lifting of No Recourse to Public Funds. We are now instructed on extension; a positive outcome will move her closer to settlement. Since grant, she has avoided further offending and is focused on parenting and employment.*



Triage & access: Our triage system—led by Alero Hart (now transitioned to Housing) and supported by volunteers—has been central to managing demand and ensuring clients receive the right help at the right time. We also recognise the vital work of Mariam Abul-Essad, whose administrative diligence underpins service delivery. Mariam has succeeded Alero as Triage Coordinator and is completing a solicitor’s apprenticeship.

7) Policy, Communications & Quality

- **Quality Standards:** Lexcel reaccreditation maintained; **Cyber Essentials** renewed.
- **Fair work:** Accredited **Living Wage** and **London Living Wage** employer.
- **Community voice:** We continue to engage with partners, funders, and networks to advocate for access to justice and social welfare law.

- **Movement stewardship:** Founded in 1970 by **Peter Kandler** and **Tony Gifford KC**, NKLC has served the community for **55 years**. We honour their legacy by investing in talent pipelines and leadership development.

Finance & oversight:

- **Finance Manager:** **Brianna Hendry** provides rigorous financial monitoring and analysis to safeguard resilience and value for money.
- **Leadership:** **Franck Kiangala**, Director, is responsible for service relevance, financial stewardship, organisational development, and NKLC's role within RBKC and the wider Law Centres Network.

8) Public Benefit Statement

The Trustees confirm that NKLC's activities deliver public benefit within the meaning of the Charities Act 2022. Our services are targeted at those who cannot afford legal help and are designed to prevent homelessness, safeguard livelihoods, maximise household income, and secure lawful status—contributing to community wellbeing and social cohesion.

9) Management, Staff & Volunteers

Staff

- **Franck Kiangala** – Director & Solicitor (Immigration & Asylum – Supervisor)
- **Brianna Hendry** – Finance Manager
- **Thalatha Wickramasinghe** – Senior Supervising Solicitor (Housing)
- **Cassim Yacoobali** – Senior Supervising Solicitor (Immigration & Asylum)
- **Shilpa Caute** – Solicitor, Senior Caseworker (Immigration & Asylum)
- **Piret Akkerman** – Senior Caseworker (Immigration & Asylum)
- **Emmy Todd** – Senior Caseworker (Immigration & Asylum)
- **Emma Louise Livesey** – Solicitor – Immigration Project Officer
- **Barry Mills** – Senior Employment Caseworker & Supervisor
- **Shirl Wong** – Solicitor – Employment (formerly Immigration & Asylum)
- **Adrian Cooper** – Senior Welfare Benefits Caseworker & Supervisor
- **Alero Hart** – Trainee Solicitor
- **Mariam Abul-Essad** – Triage Coordinator & IT, Solicitor's Apprentice
- **Receptionist, Volunteer Team Leader & Coordinator & Administrative Support Officer
- **Jordan Ako** - Billing Clerk

Volunteers

NKLC relies on volunteers who support triage and casework. Volunteers typically undertake a six-month placement (minimum one day per week). Many continue beyond their placements, contributing vital capacity and community connection.

10) Trustees

- ****Zarif Khan (Chair)****
- ****Lucinda Acland (Treasurer)****
- ****Christina Alkaff (Vice-Chair)****
- ****Abbas Dadou****
- ****Lucy Daniels****
- ****Pat Healy****
- ****Mary-Luisa Hartley****
- ****Nadia Nail****
- ****Sheridan Leo Joseph****
- ***(Simon Caro – resigned 14 November 2024)***

The Board provides strategic direction and robust governance to ensure NKLC remains focused on need, compliant with regulation, and financially sustainable.

11) Our Funders

NKLC is a not-for-profit organisation. Our work is made possible by funders who share our commitment to access to justice and positive social change. We are deeply grateful for their continued support:

- **London Councils**
- **National Lottery Community Fund**
- **Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea**
- **Trust for London**
- **Access to Justice Foundation**
- **London Legal Support Trust**
- **Kensington & Chelsea Foundation**
- **The Julia Rausing Trust**

Testimonials

- (i) *‘I want you to know that you taking the time to read through it and think about it, it has meant incredibly a lot to me. It is a very scary and lonely place to be facing legislation and rights and not have someone to just take the time to listen and explain. Please keep doing what you do,*

You are most appreciated.’

- (ii) *‘Thank you once more regarding your input. Cannot tell you how grateful I am for this. It’s not surprising to see why my friend spoke very highly of you. Your knowledge and experience are precious.*

Thank you very much for all your work and recommendations on my case. You’ ve been enormously helpful during a very difficult time.’

Appendices

Appendix A – Data Table (Matters Opened 2024–25)

Matter Category	Clients	Cases
Employment	128	130
Housing	283	291
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Appendix B – Compliance & Accreditations

- Lexcel (Law Society) – maintained.
- Living Wage & London Living Wage (Living Wage Foundation member).
- Cyber Essentials – maintained.
- Law Society Immigration & Asylum Scheme

