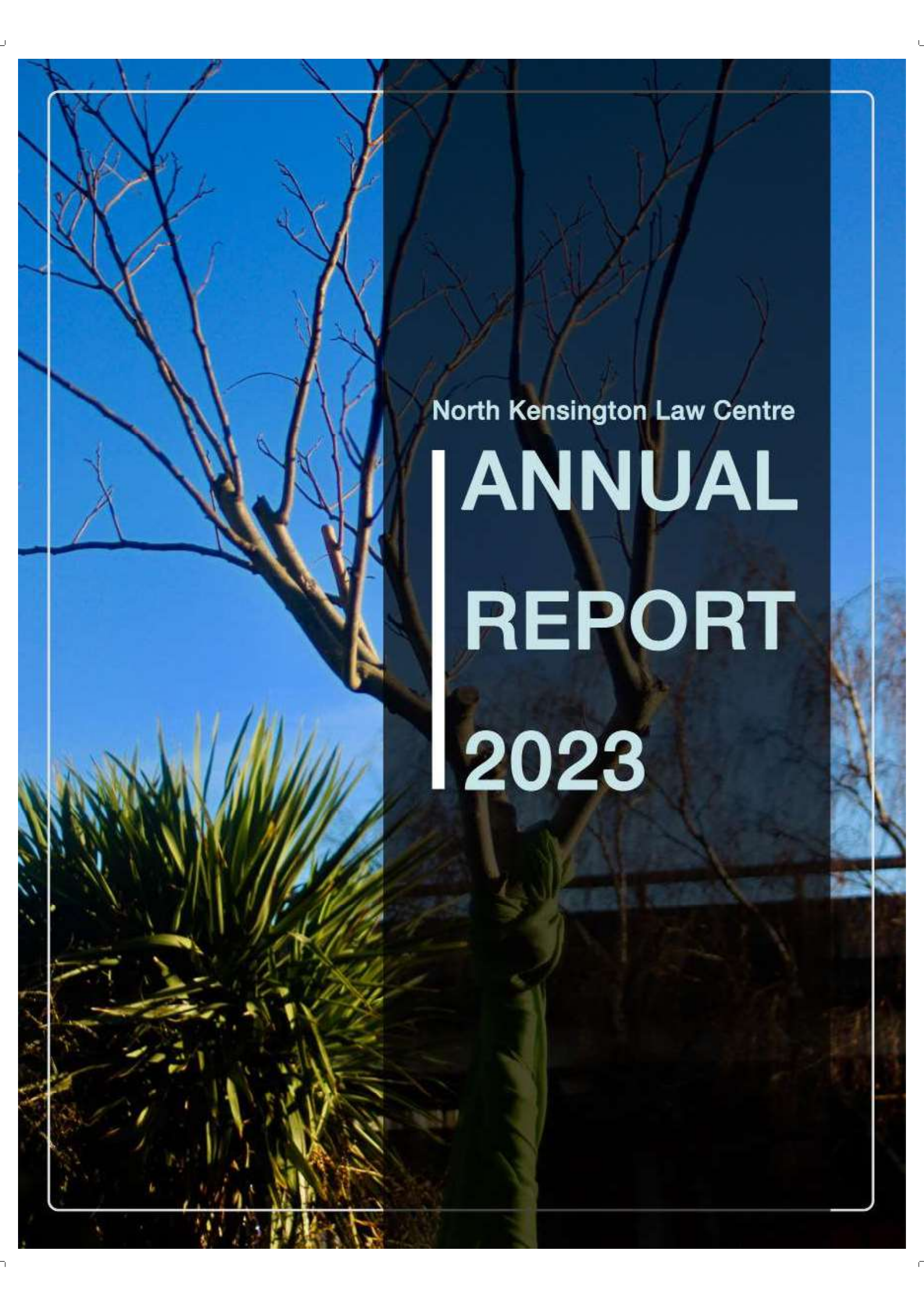




North Kensington Law Centre

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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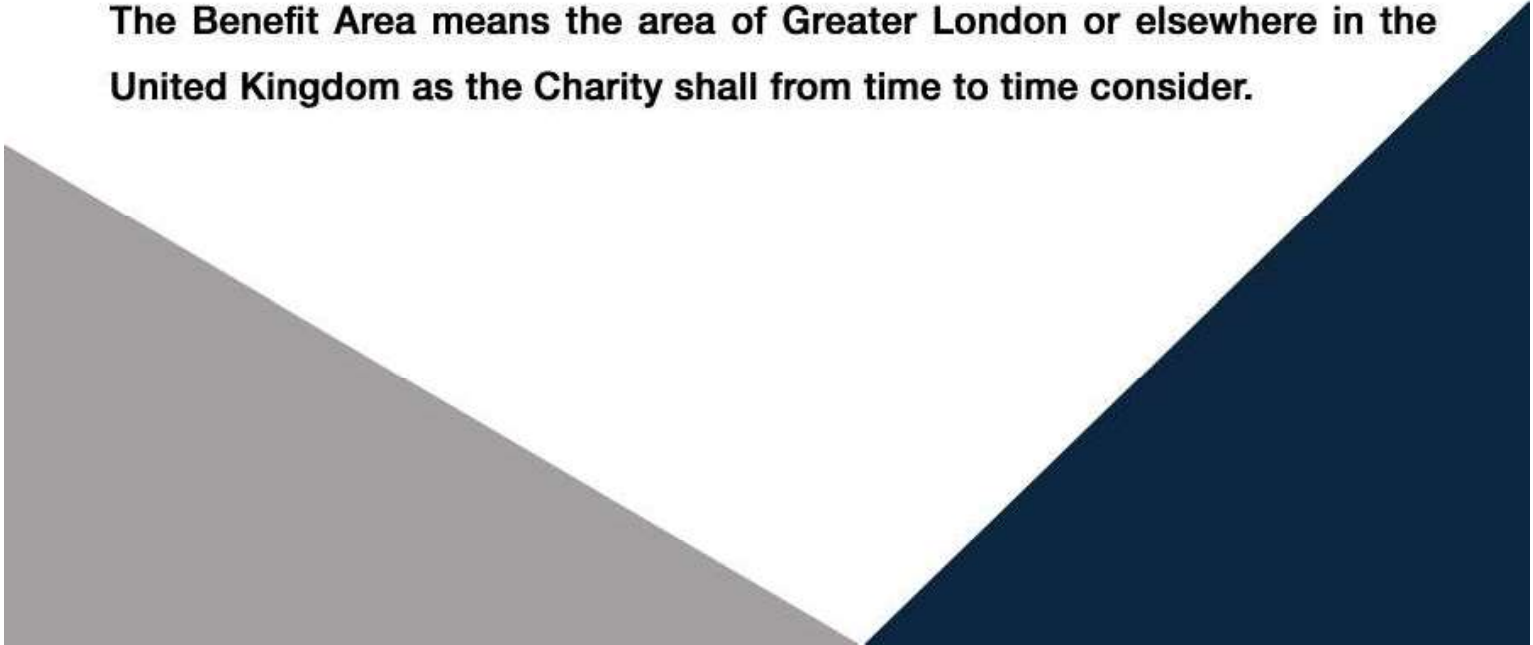


Our Objectives and Aims

North Kensington Law Centre, founded in 1970, is a charity whose objectives, as defined by the Articles of Association as amended on 11 July 2016, are:

- to relieve poor persons resident or working in the Benefit Area by**
 - providing such persons with legal services which they could not otherwise obtain through lack of means;**
- the advancement of education of persons resident or working in the Benefit Area.**
- the advancement of any charitable purposes as are beneficial to the community for persons resident or working in the Benefit Area.**

The Benefit Area means the area of Greater London or elsewhere in the United Kingdom as the Charity shall from time to time consider.





Significant Activities

The principal activity of the Law Centre continues to be the provision of legal advice and representation to persons resident or working within Greater London and beyond with priority given to those who live or work or have a connection with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

Our focus is on Housing, Asylum and Immigration (including cases funded by Legal Aid, where eligible and in scope), Welfare Benefits Employment (for which Legal Aid is not available) and Crime for which the Law Centre no longer holds a Legal Aid Contract, but a small amount pro bono work is carried out by a volunteer Crime solicitor.

The organisation holds the Lexcel Quality Mark in all these areas of practice and is an Accredited Living Wage and London Living Wage employer (member of the Living Wage Foundation).



Chair's Foreword

"To relieve poor persons, residents or working in the benefit area by providing such persons 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".

The founding objectives of the law centre written in 1971; 52 years ago, resonate today as much as they have throughout the history of North Kensington Law Centre [NKLC] and the essential help that NKLC strives to offer every day, to a wide range of diaspora communities.

I have said this before, and as Chair I'm not ashamed to admit that as ever North Kensington Law Centre continues to be the shining light in the local community representing those who are unable to access the services that every individual has a basic right to. Although the Covid-Pandemic, Grenfell, and Windrush may all be past headlines the impact continues to be felt by those most vulnerable in our society. NKLC endeavours each day to deal with the continuing enquiries and take on cases in challenging circumstances of an underfunded, underappreciated yet increasingly demanded sector. Those in need still require access to specialist services and NKLC is an innovate organisation which is offering its services and is adaptable to our clients' everyday needs.



NKLC as lead partner charity has been provider for The Rough Sleepers Project for two years now. As well as the responsibility of a lead partner, it has involved outreach work in having a worker at Heathrow Airport and although challenging in its implementation, NKLC remains committed to making it a success. There is not enough space in this preface to champion the successful and positive work undertaken by NKLC in such a short period in this and 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 continues the many struggles with the Home Office in relation to 'Windrush' payments despite political announcements and promises to the contrary.

Franck Kiangala our NKLC Director has been its saviour since he took on the immense task of leading it and he continues to excel in his post and finds funding from a 'wishing well' of organisations, to whom we extend our gratitude and their continuing support. Without his commitment, hard work and tenacity, it is no exaggeration to say that NKLC would not survive. But he like all excellent organisations and NKLC as a whole 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 could continue with the superlatives but in short, we are thankful to them because the simple fact is they remain committed to a sector which is wholly underappreciated and underfunded and yet essential to the very vulnerable in our society.

I am also indebted to my fellow Trustees who each month give up their time voluntarily to oversee the management of NKLC and likewise their devotion and enthusiasm to do good is not unnoticed. I remain indebted to them all.

NKLC remains committed and we are thankful of all your support both morally, financially and in every other way that you are there for us. We believe in the community and working together to achieve the objectives for a better society.

I commend this report to you and look forward to seeing many of you at our AGM on the 16th November 2023.

Yours,

Zarif Khan.

Chair of Trustees NKLC.

November 2023.





Director's Report

Whilst Kensington and Chelsea features among the top 10% of UK local economies in the recently published UK Prosperity Index, more than 1 in 5 (23%) Kensington and Chelsea neighbourhoods are among the 20% most income-deprived in England and Wales, one in four children in Kensington and Chelsea (24.4%) lived in poverty in 2019/20.

Deprivation in Kensington and Chelsea is not a new phenomenon, but the Grenfell Tower fire and the Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted and intensified the issue.

In particular, the economic impact of lockdowns and social restrictions have left many struggling to make ends meet, put food on the table and heat their homes.

In a more general perspective, although the hardships experienced in North Kensington and the rest of the borough were amplified due to local and specific factors, it did not escape the Law Centre's attention that the hardship was felt and continues to be felt across London and the nation.

In addition to these very challenging conditions, the crisis created by the rising costs of living is creating a perfect storm for the marginalised communities that North Kensington Law Centre was established to assist.



In light of the severe hardship that our local residents and Londoners at large have continued to feel, North Kensington Law Centre has sought to redouble its efforts in terms of being a local community as well as a Pan London asset.

We have seen that our areas of legal specialisms are important tools in the mission to relieve destitution and poverty.

As with all Law Centres, the lack of dedicated funding for specialist legal advice agencies is a challenge however, in light of the importance of our actions and their impact, it is a challenge that all at NKLC – employed staff, volunteers and Trustees – are relishing and confident that the good and important work that we carry out will continue.

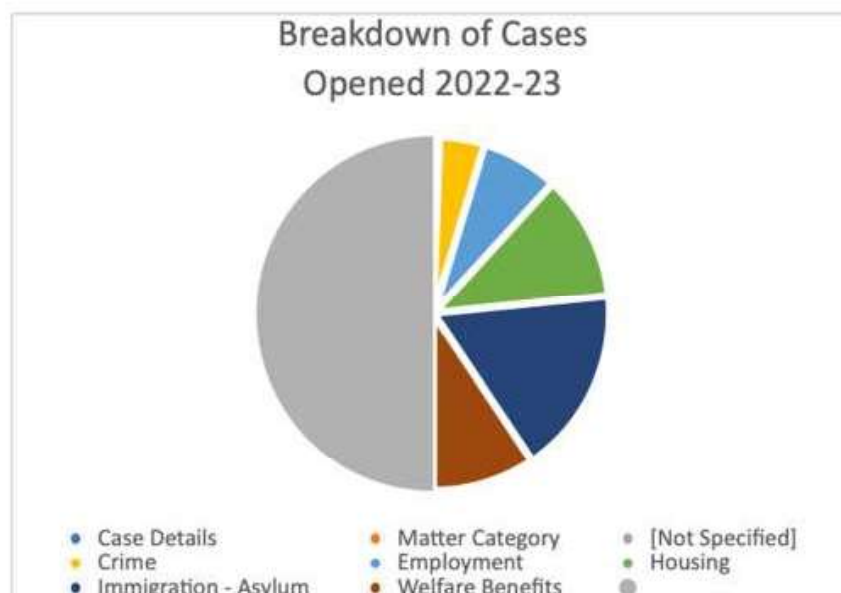
Despite the difficult times, we continue to be supported by our generous funders, to whom we are grateful for their continuing support, a list of which can be found at the end of this report.

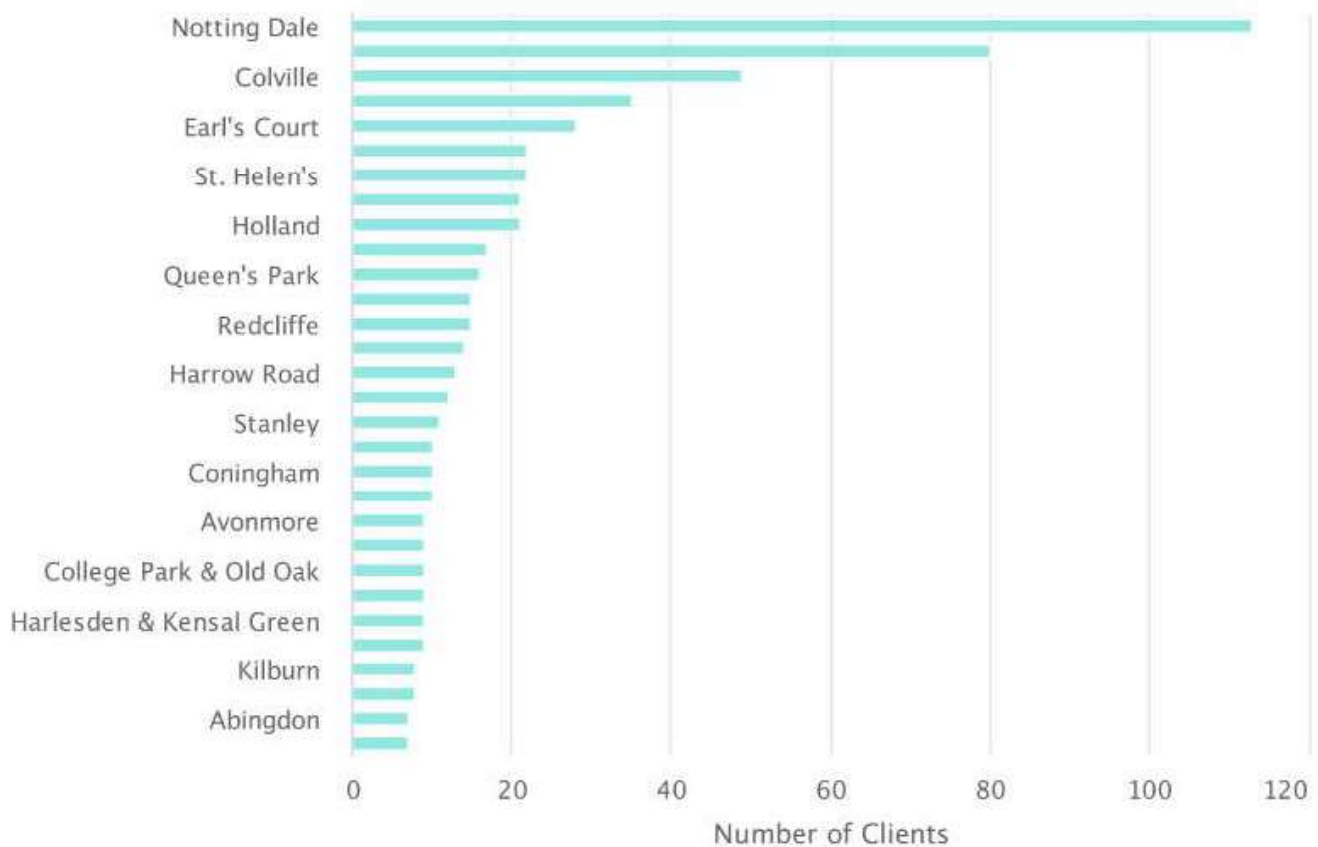
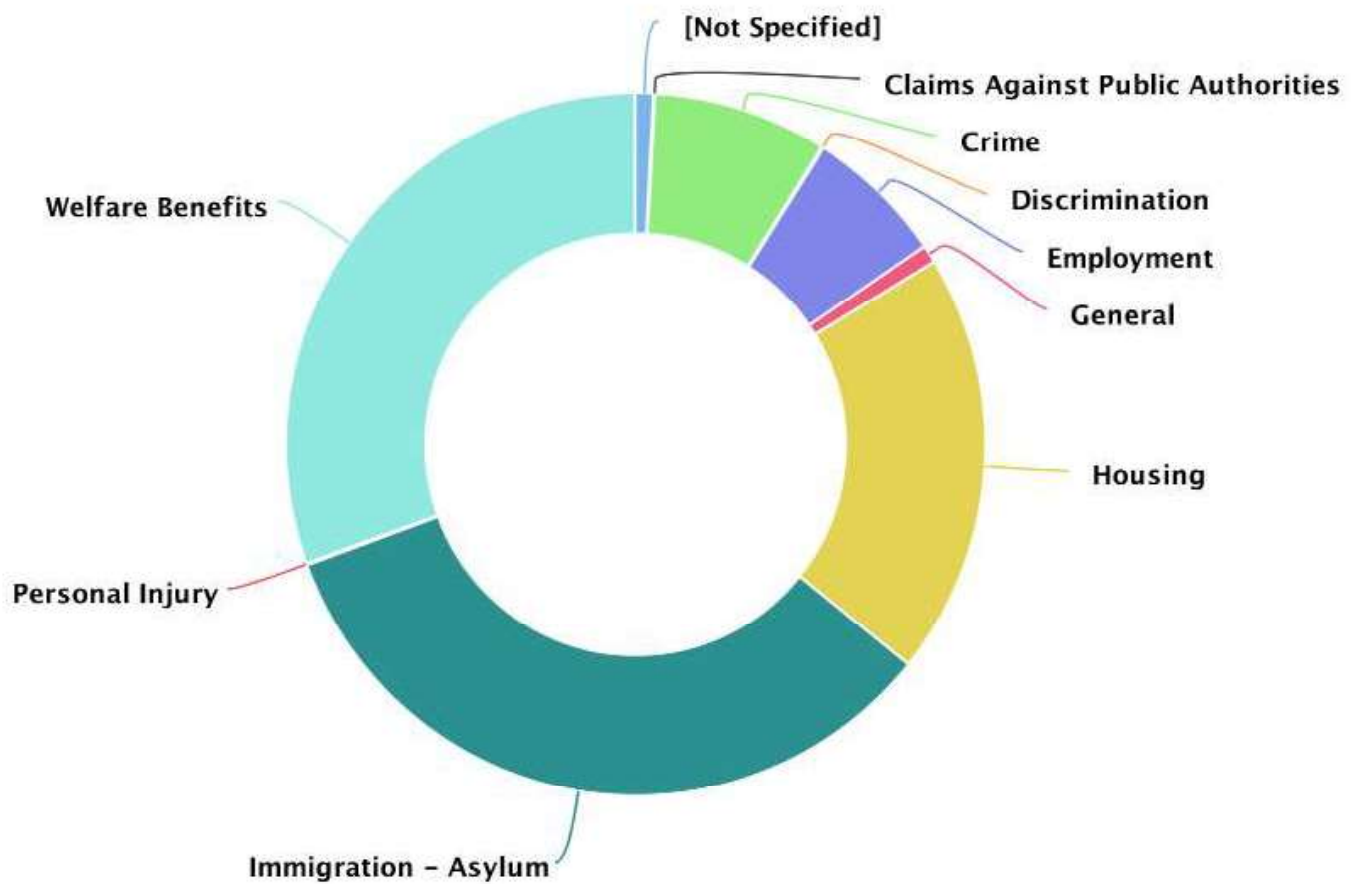


As in previous years, North Kensington Law Centre has been very busy and we assisted in the period between 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, 893 people, generating 939 cases:

Cases Opened by Category in the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

Case Details Matter Category	Client Details Count Number of Clients	Case Details Count Number of Cases
[Not Specified]	10	10
Crime	74	74
Employment	127	130
Housing	207	209
Immigration - Asylum	306	316
Welfare Benefits	169	200
Report Total	893	939





Unit Tales

Welfare Benefits

In this rising cost of living crisis, we are particularly proud of the impact that our Welfare Benefit Unit has, in improving the lives of marginalised communities through the maximisation of benefits having raised £608,508.78 in this year to date.

We are grateful to our experienced Senior Welfare Benefits Advisor Adrian Cooper, a veteran of the North Kensington Law Centre, who has now been with us for over 20 years.

"I had a recent PIP tribunal where the client was a young man with learning difficulties and ADHD. Due to his disabilities, he was about nine months late in lodging an appeal, we managed to get a late appeal accepted. His case was further delayed, so the time between making the initial application and the appeal was several years.

I accompanied him to the tribunal and represented him. He was successful in the tribunal and awarded the enhanced rates of both the daily living component, currently £101.75 per week and the enhanced mobility component at £71.00. His previous award was 'nil', so he had an increase in benefit of £172.75 per week. He also received a backdated payment of £21,284.00.

He lives at home so his mother was able to receive an increase in her Universal Credit of £185.86 per month. This payment was also backdated to the beginning of the PIP claim resulting in a backdated payment of £4,460.00.

His mother was also in receipt of Housing Benefit for much of the period. The award of PIP will also affect the HB calculation and could mean a rebate of up to £95.48 per week that will be paid back to the client's mother. We are still in the process of working out the period and the backdated payment for this, so we do not know how much she will receive. Obviously these payments will make a big difference to the family.'



Employment Unit

Our Employment Unit, which consists of Barry Mills and Helen Goztas, continues to receive a large number of enquiries across a wide range of subjects. The most common are around Dismissal, Discrimination, Wages ACAS and Tribunal processes.

The jobs that our clients do are equally diverse: including Hospitality, Kitchen workers , Security but also Teachers, Nannies, Finance and Admin, Beauty salons and Shopwork.

What we do note though is the lack of specialist Employment advice across London. Even if boroughs have Law Centres, many do not give this help and the enquiries received every week demonstrate the amount of unmet needs. We do however try to advise all those who contact us but Employment Tribunals themselves are particularly complex and time consuming with multiple documents, pre hearing processes, complex law and most hearings are multi day – 3 or more for discrimination cases.

Despite the limitations we continue to get successful results. After one recent case, our client thanked us “ for all the advocacy and assistance, as you are the only place that was open to giving me advice from the beginning to now and I couldn't have completed any of it without you all”. She also said that the knowledge she acquired from her experience enabled her to initiate and co-write the company disability policy in her new workplace.

This is pleasing as public education of workers' rights is particularly needed at present !





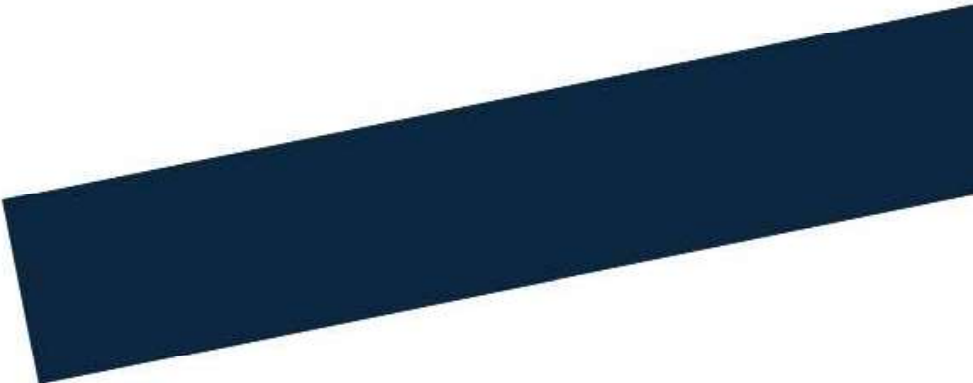
Housing Unit

The rising cost of living crisis has had many effects, locally and nationally. More specifically:

‘The cost-of-living crisis is piling pressure onto households on the lowest incomes, with the lowest income decile particularly exposed. Analysis by Crisis finds they are spending more than their income on average on housing, food and energy costs. This means that they are at risk of debt, eviction and homelessness, even before further essential living costs have been accounted for. Households in the private rented sector are particularly exposed, due to higher housing costs, with the lowest income decile facing total average housing, food and energy costs exceeding their incomes by 43 per cent.

With rents rising at record rates, findings from Crisis’ research into the cost-of-living crisis has found that over half of low-income renters across GB in November 2022 said their rent had increased and nearly one in four households in receipt of housing benefit (24 per cent) were expecting to fall behind on housing payments over the winter. Citizens Advice reports rapidly rising rent arrears among housing benefit recipients, and evictions from the private rented sector are rising and are a growing cause of homelessness.’

Extract from A tale of two crises: housing and the cost of living – A report by Crisis



Our Housing Unit, led by our Senior Supervising Solicitor Thalatha Wickramasinghe, plays a vibrant and dynamic role in seeking to tackle and bring relief to the housing crisis brought about by the rising cost of living crisis, seeking to avoid evictions and homelessness on behalf of our local residents as well as being a strong advocate for better housing conditions.



'Mr M, who was severely depressed was about to be evicted. He came to us at the last minute. He had been living in the property for about 10 years with his ex partner, who was the sole tenant of the property. He completed some papers to transfer the tenancy to our client but never chased it up.

After a few years their relationship deteriorated, and his partner returned to Spain.

Our client continued to pay the rent for another 5 years and assumed that the tenancy had been transferred to him until he received notices and court papers advising him that he was an unlawful occupier and was due to be evicted.

We represented the client and after lengthy negotiations, expert evidence in relation to his self-harm and severe depression, we were able to agree on a consent order the day before the hearing for the tenancy to be granted and transferred to our client.'



Immigration Unit

There has never been a more pressing moment in the field of Immigration and Asylum as the present headlines and recent changes in legislation show.

The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 which was followed by the Illegal Migration Act 2023 each reinforced the already existing hostile immigration environment and hardening the precarious position of migrants and asylum seekers arriving in the United Kingdom.

Our Immigration and Asylum Unit continues its excellent and highly committed work in the defence and representation of asylum seekers, migrants and their families, victims of trafficking and Modern Slavery, victims of the Windrush Scandal as well as the difficulties created by Brexit to a cohort that was previously ‘invisible ‘ in immigration terms.

NKLC has also taken the lead in a project supported by London Councils to provide expert immigration advice to non – UK rough sleeper in the North West region of London, together with our colleagues at Ealing Law Centre, to whom we are grateful for their expert support.



Our talented unit comprises of Cassim Yacoobali (Unit Supervisor), Shilpa Caute, Piret Akerman, Lola Bellieni, Franck Kiangala and Shirl Wong.



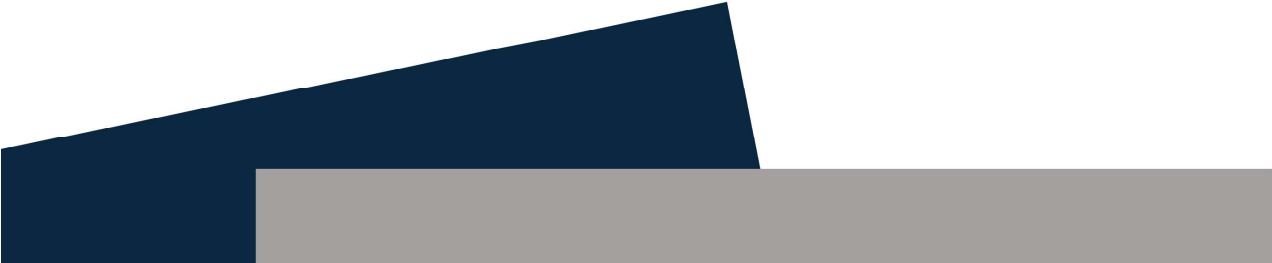


‘Our client was from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who came to the UK as an unaccompanied minor when she was only 14 years old (who shall be referred to as “G”). She had been subject to serious ill-treatment as a minor due to the political profile of a family member.

Since her arrival in the UK and despite her very difficult circumstances and the trauma she had undergone, G had built a strong support network, committed to further studies and made a positive impact on all those around her.

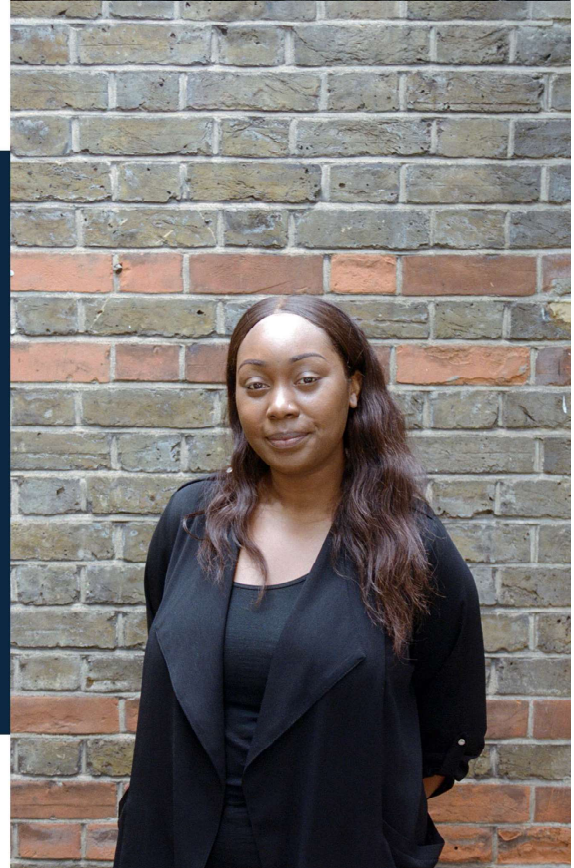
Unfortunately, her application to remain in the UK was refused just before she turned 18 and that was the start of her long and arduous journey in her fight for a safer life.

NKLC, along with Ms. Alison Harvey (experienced Human Rights barrister) represented G throughout her appeal. The judge found G to be an honest witness who did her best to assist the Tribunal at the hearing. Equally powerful was the evidence given by the many individuals present at the appeal to support G, including the testimonies of her loved ones and caseworkers. In the end, the appeal was won on both the asylum and human rights (Article 8 ECHR) grounds.’



Triage and Administration

However, all the good work performed by our colleagues would be of no value and our assistance to those most in need of less impact without the support of a dedicated and extremely efficient triaging system, which is ably and expertly led by our Triage Coordinator, Cormac Whitney – Low and his exceptional team of volunteers with the very much appreciated support of our most recent member of staff, Alero Hart, our Administrative Officer who prior to her appointment tirelessly volunteered with the Law Centre for a considerable time.



North Kensington Law Centre has been in existence for 53 years, having been founded by Peter Kandler, a local solicitor and co – founded by Lord Anthony Gifford KC and our current management sees it as a point of honour not to let the flame extinguish itself and, for this reason, Brianna Hendry, our much valued Finance Manager keeps a very ‘tight ship’ in relation to our finances and ensuring that the financial choices made are sound and add value to the Law Centre.



Our Director, Franck Kiangala has the overall responsibility to ensure that the services we bring locally and across London are relevant for the time that we are going through, the financial and managerial resilience of North Kensington Law Centre and the continued special place that North Kensington Law Centre has locally and within the Law Centres' movement.

North Kensington Law Centre is a not – for – profit organisation and its ultimate supervision rests with our valued and committed Trustees, who have supported us indefatigably throughout the years, generously donating their precious time, expertise and experience to ensure that the Law Centre excels and that the best interests of those it purports to serve are at the forefront of our actions.





Lucy Daniels – Solicitor

‘I have lived in different parts of Kensington most of my life. After many years as a tenant activist on Lancaster West Estate, I developed an interest in law, to see how we can find legal solutions to some of our community’s greatest problems, and to promote access to justice for ALL. I trained as a lawyer and practice in the field of criminal defence. But I work for free access to justice in other fields of law through my involvement as a Trustee of NKLC. I am enormously impressed by the depth of knowledge and enthusiastic dedication of our staff and volunteers, and the other trustees are not bad either. I am proud to play my part.’

Simon Caro – retired Solicitor

‘In September 2019 I was asked by a former Chair of the Trustees of NKLC if I would like to apply to become a trustee. I said that I would and was duly elected a trustee at the AGM that November. I decided to volunteer as a trustee because I support what NKLC does and felt that my experience as a solicitor who for much of my career was involved in legal aid work would be useful to the organisation.’





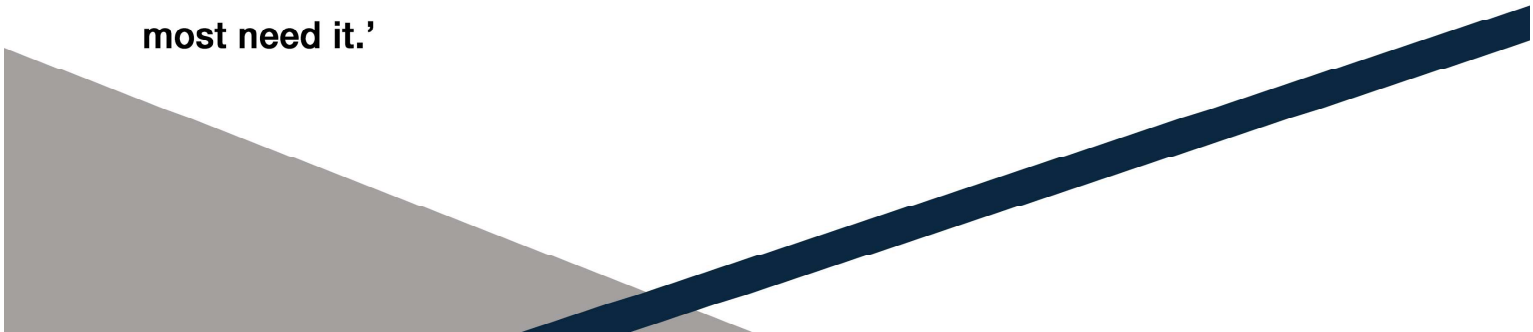
Lucinda Acland

‘ From school I qualified as a nurse at Great Ormond Street then did a law degree at The School of Oriental and African Studies, London University. I worked as a solicitor and litigation support/ IT Professional Support Lawyer at Lovell White Durrant (now Hogan Lovells). I moved to the College of Law creating online CPD courses. I then worked as the social media manager at Riverview Law. Following this I was the Community Manager for Obelisk Support, then the Head of Learning & Development, at the Legal Aid Practitioners Group.

I created the First 100 Years podcast series and co-authored the book ‘First:100 years of Women in Law’ and currently co-hosts the Kids Law podcast series. A Londoner all my life, I have lived in W10 since 1996 and absolutely love the neighbourhood. I have a great interest in how law can be used to help and educate people improve their lives. ‘

Nadia Nail

‘I am honoured and privileged to be a trustee of the North Kensington Law Centre, a brilliant organisation that assists the most vulnerable within our community. During my time as a local councillor, I saw first hand how vital direct support and empowerment is, and commend the hard work and commitment the staff and volunteers at the centre make to help those who most need it.’





Staff Members

Franck Kiangala – Director & Solicitor (Immigration & Asylum - Supervisor)

Thalatha Wickramansinghe – Senior Supervising Solicitor (Housing)

Brianna Hendry – Finance Manager

Cassim Yacoobali – Solicitor (Immigration & Asylum – Supervisor)

Shirl Wong – Solicitor (Immigration & Asylum)

Shilpa Caute – Senior Caseworker (Immigration & Asylum)

Piret Akerman – Senior Caseworker (Immigration & Asylum)

Lola Bellieni – Project Co – Ordinator Non – UK Rough Sleepers (Immigration & Asylum)

Barry Mills – Senior Employment Caseworker (Supervisor)

Helen Goztas – Employment Paralegal

Adrian Cooper – Senior Welfare Benefits Caseworker (Supervisor)

Cormac Whitney – Low – Triage Co – Ordinator

Volunteers

A very special 'Thank You' to all our volunteers as our work would not exist without their ongoing and unwavering support.

The Law Centre relies heavily on the volunteers who help to run triage and offer additional support to caseworkers.

Our volunteers undertake six-month placements (minimum one day a week) in triage or casework, depending on experience. Some volunteers continue to work at the Law Centre after the six-month placement.





Management Committee

Zarif Khan – Chair of Trustees (Barrister)

Tina Alkaff – Vice Chair of Trustees (Youth Worker)

Pat Healy - (Journalist & former Councillor)

Mary Luiza Hartley – Retired

Lucy Daniels – (Solicitor)

Nadia Nail – (Former Councillor)

Simon Caro – (Solicitor)

Harriet Beaumont – (Journalist)

Abbas Daddou – (Community Activist)

Lucinda Acland – Treasurer (Solicitor)





Our Funders

North Kensington Law Centre is a not – for – Profit organisation. Our work is only made possible through the belief that our funders have in the positive social change that our activities bring and the belief that their ethos is supported by our actions.

We are extremely grateful for their continuing and unwavering support and hope to continue delivering on the positive social changes that we commonly seek.

Our sincere thank you to:



**London Councils
National Lottery Community Fund
Royal London Borough of Kensington & Chelsea
AB Charitable Trust
Trust for London
Access to Justice Foundation
London Legal Support Trust
Hollick Family Foundation
Allen & Overy Foundation
Westminster Amalgamated Charities
Peter Stebbings Memorial Charity
The Grace Trust
Kensington & Chelsea Foundation
Legal Aid Agency**











