

NORFOLK COMMUNITY LAW SERVICE



Annual Report 2017/18

Index

Board Members & Company Details	1
Chair's Report	2
Treasurer's & Company Secretary's Report	3
Report of the Chief Executive Officer	4
Free Legal Advice Service	6
Migrant Worker Advice Service	8
Debt Advice Service	9
Welfare Benefits Service	11
Domestic Advice Service	13
Family Court Support Service	14
Housing Mediation Service	16
Norfolk Community Advice Network	17
Free Legal Advice Service Statistics	19
Other Services Statistics	20
Supporters of NCLS	21
Thank You	22

Registered Office:

St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate,
Norwich NR3 1BQ

Tel: 01603 496623

Fax: 01603 618320

e-mail: info@ncls.co.uk

Norfolk Community Law Service and NCLS are both operating names of Norfolk Community Law Service Ltd

Registered under guarantee in England under Company No. 3524607. Charity No. 1069066

Authorised by the OISC to provide immigration advice and services Ref. No. N201200043

Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority Ref. No. 620093

Honorary President

William Armstrong

Board of Directors

Benedict Keane, Chair

John Ceybird, Company Secretary & Honorary Treasurer

Ejike Ndaji, Honorary Secretary (resigned 26/02/18)

Sarah Blunden

Chris Cubitt

Gordon Dean

Liz Edwards

Annie Grant

Vanessa Morton

Michael Pendred

Margaret Sparrow

Andrew Spencer (resigned 06/07/18)

Paul Steward

Staff

Ros Brown, Chief Executive Officer

Emily Balsdon, NCAN Coordinator

Julie Bennett, Finance & Administrative Officer

Rebecca Branson, Administrative Officer

Rebecca Calthorpe, Family Law Solicitor

Sarah Clack, Operations Manager

Andy Cobb, Debt Adviser

Susan Craddock, Debt Caseworker

Joanne Freeman, Administrative Officer

Carol Gormal, Debt Caseworker

Hannah Hill, Family Court Support Service Co-ordinator

Rob Ireland, Welfare Benefits Adviser

Judi Lincoln, Advice and Volunteer Manager

Des McKeating, Migrant Worker Advice Manager

Alex Robinson, Debt Casework Assistant

Janka Rodziewicz, NCAN Strategy Manager

Tamsin Roques, Family Court Support Service Co-ordinator

Charlie Sayer, Welfare Rights Manager

Mariah Simms, Trainee Solicitor

Hana Suzuki, Migrant Worker Adviser and Administrative Officer

We are very sorry to report the death of one of our young Student Volunteers, Hanna Osica who lost her fight with cancer this year. Hanna came on a year's internship as a Surrey University Law Undergraduate and ably and cheerily fulfilled a range of roles working in most of our services. She made a great contribution and will be sadly missed.

Photographs on front cover

Ros Brown, CEO of NCLS and Sheriff of Norwich

Ros Brown, CEO, Benedict Keane, Chair of the Board of Directors, Joe Egan, Former President of the Law Society, Judi Lincoln, Advice and Volunteer Manager and Jack Dunkley, Law Society Relationships Manager for London, East & South East

Beccy Branson, Administrative Officer, David Milton, Volunteer Solicitor, Judi Lincoln, Advice & Volunteer Manager and Rob Ireland, Welfare Rights Adviser

Deryn Hall, Family Court Support Service Volunteer at Norwich Cathedral's Volunteering Event

Norfolk Community Law Service Limited (NCLS) was originally founded in 1985 under the name Norwich and District Legal Services and was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status in 1998. The objectives of NCLS are to identify unmet legal need within Norfolk and find ways to provide free services to meet those needs.

Chair's
Report



Left: Benedict Keane,
Chair, NCLS Board of Directors

‘...Access to justice has been described as the most fundamental of rights that we have. Without it our other rights – whether they are rights to property, rights under contract, public law rights or human rights – are chimerical. Access to justice is ‘not just a right in itself. It is [the] key enabler for making other fundamental rights a reality.’ - Lord Justice Ryder, Senior President of Tribunals: Assisting Access to Justice speaking at Keele University March 2018.

‘Unless everyone can get some access to the legal system when they need it, trust in our institutions and the rule of law breaks down. When that happens society breaks down.’ Bach Commission September 2017.

The remit of NCLS is to try to ensure access to justice and equality for anyone living or working in Norfolk but, as the above quotes suggest, this is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve as the impact of the Legal Aid cuts and other cuts in public funding of advice provision continue to affect increasing numbers of people in seeking the timely advice they need.

We were very grateful for the opportunity to feed into the Lords debate on the Bach Commission Report on the impact of the Legal Aid cuts through Lord Alan Howarth who spoke about the impact the cuts have had on NCLS and our clients. The report identifies Family Law as the area most impacted by loss of Legal Aid which is evidenced by the increasing demand for our Family Court Support Service which we set up in response to the cuts, although recognising that this is no substitute for professional legal advice. We are delighted that Lord Bach has

agreed to give our 2018 Law Lecture entitled ‘The Right to Justice and the Necessity for the Reform of Legal Aid’.

Another area of major concern this year has been the high overturn rate of welfare benefit appeals. NCLS was winning 83% of all cases which went to Tribunal in 2017/18 and the overturn rate nationally was around 63% for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) appeals which shows that there is clearly something wrong with the assessment process and DWP decision making.

I am delighted that the success of NCLS has been recognised by the appointment by Norwich City Council of our CEO Ros Brown as Sheriff of Norwich for the 2018/19 civic year which is enabling her to promote the advice sector and more particularly the interests of the vulnerable clients we try to help.

We are very grateful for the continuing support of the Norfolk and Norwich Law Society. Congratulations go to our volunteer solicitor David Milton for winning the Law Society’s 2018 award for Best Pro Bono Contribution – David is one of 65 solicitor volunteers who advise clients on our behalf. Without their invaluable contribution and that of our other volunteers, including around 45 UEA Law students, we could not help the numbers of clients we do. Congratulations also go to Audrey Ludwig, who advises our clients on discrimination issues, on the creation of Suffolk Law Centre which officially opened in March 2018.

Whilst securing funding for all our services continues to be challenging, we have managed to secure some funding for new initiatives as well as for our existing services. We are very

grateful for the continued substantial funding we receive from Norwich Consolidated Charities as well as the financial support we receive from Norfolk County, Norwich City, Broadland and North Norfolk Councils, UEA, MAP, Mid-Norfolk CAB, Access to Justice Foundation, Legal Education Foundation, Comic Relief, Henry Smith Charity, Money Advice Service, the A B Charitable Trust, Eastern Legal Support Trust, Law Society, Mills & Reeve, Cromer Town Council, Victory Housing, Falgate Fund, Shaw Trust and Healthy Norwich and West Norfolk CCGs. Thanks also to our landlords Voluntary Norfolk.

Thanks go as always to Vanessa Morton, Chair of the NCLS Supporters Group, for organising a number of successful fundraising events, including the annual law lecture by Martha Spurrier, Director of Liberty, and the Bishop’s Garden reception in May 2018. We were sad to hear of the death of our long-time Supporter Raymond Frostick in June 2018. Thanks also go to William Armstrong, our Honorary President, for all his continued support.

Finally I would like to thank all our staff and volunteers, as well as my fellow Directors, particularly John Ceybird for his support for our financial affairs. We were sad to lose Ejike Ndaji from the Board in 2017/18 because of pressures of work and thank him for his contribution. We were also very sad to lose long serving Director Andrew Spencer in July 2018 but delighted at his well-deserved appointment as a full time District Judge.

Benedict Keane
Chair, NCLS Board of Directors

Treasurer & Company Secretary's Report



Left: John Ceybird,
Honorary Treasurer & Company Secretary

I am pleased to report that prudent financial management has resulted in a reasonably satisfactory financial outcome for the year to 31 March 2018. The deficit for the year was a manageable loss of £2,662 (which compares favourably with the deficit of £22,204 incurred in the previous year). The continuing expansion of NCLS's services is expressed by the increase in expenditure from £414,426 in 2016/17 to £473,059 in 2017/18. The increase in service provision is shown by our largest single expense, staff and sub-contract labour costs, which are up by 17% from £338,630 to £384,517, reflecting the development of all of our services.

The expansion of our services has been funded by an increase in our income of nearly 20%, up from £392,222 to £470,397, which includes funding paid in advance that will be expended in the current financial year. Our income principally derives from grants received, which are detailed elsewhere in the Annual Report. In addition, we have received donations from private individuals, and our Supporters Group continues to make a valuable contribution to our funds.

The deficit for the year of £2,662 has been financed from our revenue reserves. At 31 March 2018, the reserves of NCLS comprised capital reserves of £2,416 (which represent the undepreciated value of our office furniture and computer equipment) and revenue reserves of £123,153. It is the policy of the Board of NCLS to seek to maintain reserves sufficient to provide coverage for three months' budgeted

expenditure. As at 31 March 2018, the reserves were insufficient to cover three months' budgeted expenditure of £140,800 for the current financial year to 31 March 2019. However, compliance with the reserves policy had been restored by September 2018.

Nevertheless, there is a continuing requirement for the Board to secure funding for the future operations of NCLS, which are planned to expand in the light of the growing demand for the services provided by NCLS. The Directors are conscious of their responsibility to monitor the ongoing financial position of NCLS, to both meet the increasing demand for all services but also to try to fill gaps in provision. In particular, the Directors continue actively to seek funding to meet the core costs of NCLS.

Finally, I wish to point out that the financial accounts of NCLS do not reflect the value of the time committed to our work by our volunteers and supporters, including local firms of solicitors and UEA students, without whose unpaid work NCLS would not be able to function.

John Ceybird
Honorary Treasurer & Company Secretary

NCLS Financial Summary from 2013-14 to 2017-18

Year to 31 st March	17-18	16-17	15-16	14-15	13-14
	£	£	£	£	£
Income	470,397	392,222	381,021	376,586	354,669
Expenditure	473,059	414,426	395,514	361,055	320,681
of which: Staff Costs	384,059	338,630	291,199	265,020	232,114
Revenue Reserves at Year End	123,780	127,752	150,052	158,348	139,008

Report of the Chief Executive Officer



Left: Ros Brown,
Chief Executive Officer

In addition to the continuing impact of the Legal Aid cuts and further welfare benefit reforms, the 2017/18 financial year saw increasing numbers of our clients affected by zero hours contracts, low incomes and increases in rent levels meaning that many do not have enough income to live on. And that is before Universal Credit is rolled out in Norwich in October 2018 which is expected to exacerbate the situation.

We helped a total of 2,672 clients in 2017/18, a 7.2 % increase on the previous year, and have had to turn clients away, particularly from FLA sessions and those seeking support for welfare benefit appeals. The complexity of issues clients are presenting with also continues to increase.

NCLS is the lead agency for the Norwich City Council funded Financial Inclusion Consortium which particularly focusses on provision of debt, welfare benefits and housing advice for vulnerable clients. We were delighted to welcome Norfolk Citizens Advice as a new partner in April 2018. We are working with the Council to identify improvements to their systems to reduce the demand for advice and also, in partnership with Norwich Credit Union, to explore alternative low cost credit options to 'pay day lenders'.

I was invited to speak at the Civil Justice Council National Forum in December which was an opportunity to promote the success of NCLS and the Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN) in responding to cuts in Legal Aid. It was clear from that event that Norfolk is well ahead of other areas in developing innovative initiatives to help vulnerable clients and that NCAN is gaining increasing national recognition as a good model of partnership working.

One of NCAN's main activities over the last year has been to work with the County and District Councils and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to support the development across Norfolk of Social Prescribing, which seeks to address people's needs in a holistic way, and to advocate for an advice based approach. We are grateful for the County Council funding for NCAN for this project and hope that evidence of the impact of effective early advice in avoiding homelessness and improving health will help us to secure funding from CCG's, thereby making NCAN more sustainable. We were very sorry that our NCAN Strategy Manager, Janka Rodziewicz, left in June

2018 to take up another job. Thanks go to NCAN Co-ordinator Emily Balsdon who has so effectively assumed responsibility for co-ordinating NCAN delivery in conjunction with NCAN partners.

The Welfare Benefits Team dealt with an increasing workload in 2017/18 representing at 299 Tribunals, a 32% increase on 2016/17. They continue to have a high rate of success with 82.4% of appeals which go to Tribunal allowed, securing income generation for clients of £1,790,753 in 2017/18. Total income generation since the start of project in 2013 is £5,604,890, a figure which is calculated on the basis of one year forwards from the date of Tribunal when in practice many appellants are given two or three year awards. We continue to campaign against the evidently flawed DWP decision making process and were grateful to Norman Lamb, MP, who raised the issue of the high overturn rate on our behalf with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who suggested that the high rate of overturn was because of new evidence presented at the Tribunal hearing rather than because of a faulty assessment process or poor decision making by the DWP.

For many years we have delivered our Domestic Abuse Service in partnership with domestic abuse charity Leeway so are delighted to have been invited to be a partner in their successful bid for Controlling Migration Fund funding for Norfolk and Suffolk. Our principal role in the project, Project Safety Net+, which started in June 2018, will involve the Migrant Worker Service providing immigration advice and representation for victims of domestic abuse who have no recourse to public funds. The Migrant Worker Service saw a drop in client numbers in 2017/18 of approximately 20% which we think resulted from the Government's announcement in March 2017 starting the process of the UK leaving the EU.

Demand for family advice continues to grow and we regularly have to turn people away from the Tuesday Free Legal Advice drop-in sessions. During 2017/18 the Family Court Support Service helped 141 clients, a 13% increase on the previous year. In response to this demand and also in response to the shortage of Legal Aid provision for domestic abuse in Norfolk, we started to employ a Family Solicitor for two days a week from April 2018 – by the end of September she had helped a total of around 80 clients, a number of whom required

Providing Access to Justice & Equality



Left: Mariah Simms, Justice First Fellowship trainee solicitor

quite in-depth support. However we have no dedicated funding for this post and are currently working on a number of applications for grants for this purpose.

We were very pleased that UEA agreed to renew their previous three year partnership agreement with us in August 2017 and are delighted to finally be able to start working with the law students in the recently developed UEA Law Clinic building at Earlham Hall.

We have continued to develop Skyping as a cost effective means of delivering advice in a county with such a diverse geographical spread as Norfolk. The provision of advice by Skype is also particularly effective for domestic abuse clients as it saves them from having to travel into Norwich and risk being followed by an abusive partner. We are using Skyping as the main means of delivery of immigration advice under Project Safety Net+.

In terms of future aims and objectives, our main priority as always is to try to secure sustainable funding for our existing services as well as to fund service improvements or developments to meet identified need. The long awaited introduction of our new AdvicePro data base in April 2018 means we are more easily able to measure the impact of our services, thereby providing much needed evidence to support funding bids.

We are exploring the development of a free legal advice service in Kings Lynn with the help of former High Sheriff of Norfolk James Bagge who has links with local solicitors. We will continue to work through NCAN in partnership with the City Council to prepare for the roll out of Universal Credit in Norwich in October 2018. We are working closely with the DWP who are hosting workshops to address the impact of Universal Credit on specific issues e.g. housing.

The training contract of our Justice First Fellow Mariah Simms is due to finish in December 2018 and, given our success in developing an innovative training programme and securing Solicitors Regulation Authority accreditation as a training provider, we are intending to submit an application to host a further Fellowship. We are grateful to Mills and Reeve and MAP for their financial contribution to this project.

We were very saddened by the death at the age of 20 of Hanna Osica, a law student who had chosen to spend a year working with us full

time as part of her law course at the University of Surrey. Although she was diagnosed with cancer half way through that time she chose to continue coming into work even when she was quite seriously ill.

I would like to thank all the NCLS Board members for their support and particularly all the NCLS staff and volunteers for their hard work and commitment in dealing with their ever increasing workloads. Thanks to our Admin Team for their support in managing the pressures of increasing client demand for all our services.

Ros Brown
Chief Executive Officer

clientfeedback

Of those FLA clients who completed our User Feedback Questionnaires, 82% felt better informed about their rights and options, over 89% felt the information and advice was given in a clear way and 94% felt the service was welcoming and approachable.

Comments received included:

"I think this is a very good place to come for advice and for free. You do a very good job, all staff are very friendly. Keep up all the good work."

"Excellent service, so pleased I came to see you. Service, advice and staff all so useful and you've helped me massively. Thank you."

"I feel this is a great place to come for legal advice, when sometimes you don't understand procedures, a life line."

studentfeedback

"Thanks for making my time at NCLS so enjoyable but most of all rewarding. One of the reasons I came to study law at UEA was the opportunity to work at NCLS. I have developed so many skills and grown as a person through volunteering."

"I really appreciate the opportunity to fulfil a quasi-legal role at NCLS which has not only helped me but has also provided the chance to help vulnerable members of the public who would otherwise have no or limited support. Academic theory is all very well, but there is nothing like practical application of the law to instil understanding and to demonstrate your abilities"

"One thing that NCLS has really taught me is the value of access to justice. In a time when Legal Aid cuts leave its accessibility almost non-existent, an organisation like NCLS really has become a saviour for people in Norfolk, and I am always amazed and awed by the skill and passion of the staff and of the solicitors who volunteer there. Many of the clients I speak to are facing some of the hardest times they've known and, for me, to be even a small part in facilitating a helping hand is incredibly humbling and gratifying. Above all else I feel so incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to be a part of an organisation which encapsulates all the good the law can do."

Free Legal Advice Service

We currently run three Free Legal Advice (FLA) services thanks to the contribution of 65 experienced private solicitors and barristers who so generously give their time for free.

Norwich - a twice weekly drop in service is held at our office in St Clements House. On Tuesdays we have General and Family Law solicitors and on Fridays General and Employment solicitors. UEA Law students attend the FLA sessions to observe and provide support where appropriate.

Cromer - every Tuesday evening a by appointment service is held at Merchants Place and sessions cover Employment, General, Family, Wills and Probate and Elderly Client Care.

Great Yarmouth - every week by appointment services are held alternately at Great Yarmouth Citizens Advice and at Kingside Enterprise Hub. Sessions cover Family, Employment, Wills and Probate and Elderly Client Care.

Solicitor Firms Providing Norwich FLA 2017/18

Ashburnham Law
Ashtons Legal
BBL Family Law
Birketts Solicitors
Broads Authority
Clapham & Collinge Solicitors
Cozens Hardy Solicitors LLP
Eversheds Sutherland
Family Law Consultancy
FM Family Law
Fosters Solicitors
GMS Law
Gordon Dean Solicitors LLP

Hatch Brenner Solicitors
Howard Pollok & Webb
Howes Percival
Longe & Co
Leathes Prior Solicitors
Linked Law
MJP Solicitors
Mills & Reeve
Scott-Moncrieff Associates
Spire Solicitors LLP
Steeles Law Solicitors
Story & Robison

Solicitors who have provided advice at Norwich sessions:

Sue Bailey
Tom Bailey
Helen Barnes
Peter Baughan
Adam Blenkinsop
Simon Bransby
Rebecca Calthorpe
Sian Carrel
Richard Clegg
Ginny Colman
Alex Curnow
Gordon Dean
Ben Dures
Mark Foley
Graham Gall

Sarb Gosal
Nicky Gough
Sam Greenhalgh
David Harris
Sally Harris
Catherine Hepworth
Robert Hickford
Kristian Jones
Deborah Lloyd
Jo Longe
Matthew Lord
Linda Marshall
Amanda Maruca
David Milton
Caroline Mitchell

Carla Morphett
Naomi Newell
Jessica Piper
Maya Ribbands
Belinda Robison
Laura Savage
Andrew Spencer
Lucy Steele
Gareth Stevens
Robert Tiffen
Stephanie Walmsley
Owen Warnock
Sara Westwood
Simon Willis
Jenny Williams

Solicitors who have provided advice at Cromer:

Working Law Solicitors
Clapham & Collinge Solicitors
Silver and Ward Solicitors
Hansells Solicitors
Butcher Andrews
Pope & Co

Sally Davenport
Neale Gearson, Lesley Ward
Clare Mayell
Neil Stubbs
Julia Buckingham, James Eden
Greg Pope

Solicitors who have provided advice at Great Yarmouth:

Chamberlins
England & Co
Gordon Dean Solicitors LLP
Norton Peskett
Scott-Moncrieff Associates
Spire Solicitors

Malcolm Duffield
Christopher Porter
Gordon Dean
Tracey Jordan, David Rose
Ben Dures
David Harris, Richard Bevan

Providing Access to Justice & Equality

Achievements

A total of 1,789 client matters were advised through our FLA services in 2017/18 (1,491 in Norwich, 151 in Cromer and 147 in Great Yarmouth). This is an overall increase of 2.52% on the previous year but it should be noted that the service is now running at full capacity and over this last year we have had to increasingly turn away clients or refer them to future sessions. The FLA service which saw the biggest increase in demand was Family Law with numbers increasing by 14.7% on 2016/17.

We are delighted to report that the numbers of solicitors on the 3 FLA rotas is at an all time high of 65 (compared to 35 in 2011/12). During the year we noted the increasing complexity of issues with which clients are presenting so we are continuously working to improve our triaging of clients to ensure they can get the help they need as it remains challenging for the solicitor to advise clients in the 15 minute time slots available.

We have also taken on 16 cases, some very complex, ranging in matters from consumer issues to small claims cases. Particular thanks go to solicitor David Milton who has given a great deal of time to provide a number of clients with in-depth support to pursue their issues. In one complex contentious probate case, David assisted a family who could not afford legal representation to take on their case themselves. After 2 years the very grateful client reported he had made enough progress to convince specialist contentious probate solicitors to represent him and reported the firm was happy to act without advance payment.

Norwich Employment Factfinding Service

This service is now well established and delivered by a team of UEA Law students. The team carries out fact finding interviews prior to the client's appointment with the employment solicitor. Where appropriate the students then provide further support, for example, under supervision from the solicitor drafting letters for clients to send to employers. This additional support ensures clients get the most out of their session with the solicitor and enables the volunteers to develop their skills and knowledge. Thanks go to UEA students Joshua Hoare, Faye Milton, Joseph Pridmore, Christopher Thorp, Sebastian Martin and Sharaf Shiekha.

The fact finding service assisted 102 clients in 2017/18. We are continuing to develop

this support for the Employment FLA service to assist more clients and are also exploring the possibility of developing an Employment Tribunal representation service.

Service Funding

In 2017/18 the FLA Cromer service received dedicated funding from Cromer Town Council and the Victory Housing Trust. All the FLA services were supported by grants from Broadland Council and Norwich Consolidated Charities towards our core costs as well as the funding we receive from our partnership agreement with UEA.

solicitorfeedback

"As President of Norfolk and Norwich Law Society, much of the work I have done this year has focused on the discussion about access to justice. Cuts in Legal Aid and welfare benefit reforms have left many people in a vulnerable financial situation and unable to access legal advice when they need it most.

I am proud to be one of the many lawyers in Norfolk who give their time to support NCLS and the invaluable role the service plays in helping people receive access to Justice. Norfolk and Norwich Law Society is committed to continuing a relationship with NCLS to help continue to provide access to justice to those who need it most."

Sue Bailey

Future Aims & Objectives

We continue to encourage all firms across Norfolk to be represented on the rotas and we are exploring the development of Free Legal Advice Services in the Kings Lynn area. We make applications to the Bar Pro Bono Unit with the aim of securing barristers to represent clients who have cases with merit and who are not able to obtain legal aid and cannot afford to pay for advice and representation. We will also continue to seek the support of local Barristers' Chambers so our clients can have representation. We continue to use Skype to enable service delivery to clients who are unable to get to our office in Norwich or attend appointments at our outreach services. We will continue to develop the support we are able to offer to FLA clients through improved fact finding and assisting with light touch further work, such as letters before action, and using student volunteers to help with Small Claims applications. We will continually review and assess gaps and demand for legal

advice services and work with the local legal community to address and find ways to fill them.

Thanks

We are grateful to all the FLA firms and individual solicitors listed above. There is not enough room here to include all the excellent feedback given but it is clear that clients are genuinely impressed and grateful for the service they receive. Our thanks also go to all the volunteers who ably run our very busy Norwich FLA reception service including Anna Stothers, Chris Moore, Tamsin Roques, Carmen Buse, Cara Walker, Florence Baldwin, Brendan Hatch & Hanna Osica. Thanks also to volunteer receptionist Helen Ranson at Cromer. In Great Yarmouth thanks go to all the staff, Jenny Keenor and Mel Gooch, and volunteers Simon Parry, Michelle Braniff and Richard Brighton from the Kingside and Enterprise Hub and Citizens Advice for assisting with reception. Thanks also go to the UEA student admin team who so ably supported all NCLS services and activities: Rosie Reynolds, Ellie Yusuf Osman, Alex Smith, Darshy Sivananthasanthony, Max Attwood, Katherine Kibrya- Dean, Morgan Heneke, Megan Kearns, Sheena Baluyos and Rebecca Crowe.

Our appreciation goes to the staff at Merchants Place in Cromer who continue to support our service and our partners at Great Yarmouth Citizens Advice, GYROS, DIAL, MAP and Herring House. Thanks also to the student employment volunteers and the employment solicitors who have supported the service development by supervising the students' work.

We are also grateful to the Norfolk & Norwich Law Society for their continued support and for providing us and our student volunteers with opportunities for training and professional development.

Judi Lincoln
Advice & Volunteer Manager

Migrant Worker Advice Service



Left: Hana Suzuki, Migrant Worker Adviser & Des McKeating, Migrant Worker Advice Manager

The main remit of the Migrant Worker Service is to provide immigration advice to European Economic Area (EEA) Nationals and to help with challenging incorrect benefit refusals. The service aims to make it easier for European migrants to integrate into UK life. Migrants from Europe continue to make a positive contribution to the UK economy and society; however their experience of life in the UK is not always without difficulties. Since the Referendum on membership of the European Union EEA migrants in the UK have faced a great deal of uncertainty and insecurity. This has made it very difficult to provide advice.

Immigration advice is regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) and it is an offence to provide such advice without being approved by the OISC. As OISC level 1 advisers, we provide advice on a range of issues including rights of residence for EEA Nationals and their family members, rights to work and which welfare benefits clients are entitled to claim. This often requires a great deal of work to navigate the complex bureaucracy that governs an individual's exact entitlements. This varies for each client depending on their situation and that of their family and we often have to go back through several years' worth of information.

Achievements

We advised a total of 173 new clients in 2017/18. This is a decrease of around 20% on last year which we believe has followed from the Government's announcement in March 2017 starting the process of the UK leaving the EU.

Since announcing that there will be a new process for EEA nationals to apply for residence the Government have been advising EEA nationals not to apply for documents under the current regulations. This advice has had wide circulation and has resulted in a reduction in EEA nationals making applications for residence documents such as documents certifying permanent residence (necessary before an application for British citizenship can be made). For those people who make applications for residence documents this has resulted in the application processing time being vastly reduced – the Home Office are now dealing with these applications in around 5 weeks rather than 6 months in the year before.

We continue to provide immigration advice to EEA Nationals throughout the County, including outreach sessions in Great Yarmouth, as well as regularly seeing clients in Norwich. Our close partnership working, which has developed over a number of years with organisations such as Leeway,

clientfeedback

"It was flawless – really helpful, very patient, spoke clearly and slowly."

"I cannot say anything negative. I came and they gave me the information and answered all my questions. I received all the help I needed."

Norfolk Citizens Advice, Access in Kings Lynn (formerly KLARS) and Mid-Norfolk Citizens Advice, has helped us to strengthen our service delivery.

The majority of cases we have seen over the past year have related to nationality and permanent residence issues. This reflects people wanting to secure their right to live in the UK in advance of Britain leaving the EU.

In partnership with Leeway Domestic Violence and Abuse Service we successfully bid to be part of a project funded by the Government's Controlling Migration Fund helping migrant victims of domestic abuse. Following an incident of domestic violence or abuse a person's right to live in the UK is often precarious. The project, which officially started in June 2018, will provide help in Norfolk and Suffolk and NCLS will provide and organise immigration advice to allow victims to make an informed decision on their options.

Future

Although the service has seen a reduction in the number of clients this year, we expect that there will be a substantial increase in demand for the service over the next two years. EEA nationals will be required to apply for residence documents before the end of 2020 and this is likely to result in many people needing help to make applications under the new system which will be introduced at the end of this year.

We are in the process of working towards gaining approval from the OISC to provide immigration advice at level 2. This will allow us to provide advice on Asylum and more complex immigration applications to the Home Office.

Des McKeating
Migrant Worker Advice Manager

Casestudy (Names have been changed)

Miss H is Polish and had lived in the UK for 10 years, working for the NHS during this time. She had never applied for any documents confirming her residence (EEA nationals do not need to). The fact that Britain is leaving the EU had prompted Miss H to get advice on her status in the UK. After receiving advice from us she decided that she would like to apply to become a British Citizen. We helped her to make an application for a document confirming her permanent residence in the UK as the first step to applying for citizenship. Once she had obtained this document we gave her further advice and helped her complete an application for citizenship. Within 5 months her application had been processed successfully and she attended a ceremony where she was given her certificate of citizenship.

Debt Advice Service



Left:

Andy Cobb, Debt Advice Manager, Carol Gormal, Debt Advice Caseworker & Kenya Flute, Debt Advice Casework Assistant

The Debt Advice Service offers advice, support, casework and representation to people who are having difficulties with their debts. The service can help anyone in Norfolk but is particularly aimed at vulnerable people or those with complex needs, for example:

- Offenders, ex-offenders or their families
- People with mental health problems
- People with learning disabilities
- Those with a disability or long-term illness

Funding is provided principally by the Money Advice Service (MAS), channelled through Citizens Advice as the project co-ordinator. Our service also received additional funding support from Norwich Consolidated Charities, Norwich City Council, Comic Relief, Henry Smith Charity, A B Charitable Trust and from the Shaw Trust.

Service Developments

After two years in which funding from MAS was only offered for six months at a time, MAS has now confirmed funding for the year to 31 March 2019, providing some welcome certainty for the service.

We achieved our target for new clients seen of 407 for 2017/18, this number being unchanged from the year before. However, this target is set arbitrarily by MAS and does not reflect the underlying level of demand for the service which remains buoyant nor the level of complexity of many of the cases. It is difficult to ascertain at this stage whether this increased demand is a temporary phenomenon, or whether it represents a more sustained shift.

Our pilot project working with Shaw Trust has been highly successful and we hope to shortly make this a permanent arrangement. The scheme involves delivering a debt advice service to prisoners at HMP Bure, with a case manager at the Prison assisting the client with the information we need, and supporting the

client. The service is delivered via e-mail, post or telephone, which is much more efficient than having to arrange prison visits.

Debt Trends

Debt continues to be a major source of stress and anxiety for millions of people. Nationally, personal indebtedness continues to rise, having reached a total of £1.5877 trillion at the end of May 2018. This figure is £58 billion higher than a year before, and is predicted by the Office for Budget Responsibility to reach £2.296 trillion by 2022, a further 45% increase.

An independent review of debt advice funding, published in January 2018, identified that approximately 1.7 million people nationally require debt advice, but that current capacity is only 1.1 million. It would therefore seem likely that even if personal indebtedness remained static, demand for debt advice will continue to exceed capacity by a considerable margin.

The Money Advice Trust has published a study looking at how debt trends have changed over the past ten years ('A Decade in Debt' September 2018). They noted that more people at both ends of the age spectrum were seeking advice, but also that the complexity of their debt issues had increased significantly. Worryingly, they also reported a sizeable increase in people with 'deficit budgets', who simply didn't have enough income to cover their essential expenses.

We have experienced similar trends over the past year. Whilst it can be seen as positive that more people are coming forward to deal with their debts, where the underlying problem is insufficient income to meet basic expenses, it is much harder to make a sustainable difference to a client's situation. For many, credit card debt has receded as the main issue, having been replaced by problems paying Council Tax, rent, utilities and everyday household expenses.

Our Clients

The majority of our clients have additional vulnerabilities on top of their financial difficulties, which often exacerbates their debt problem. As a consequence, many are unable to deal with their debt situation alone and require full advocacy.

The average consumer credit debt nationally is £4,087 per person, but our client's indebtedness tends to be higher; currently the average is £7,749.

We try to develop a plan with each client which is tailored to their individual financial circumstances, with the aim of clearing the debts within a reasonable timeframe. We take care to set out the available options and assist the client in making an informed choice. This process helps to ensure that the client once again feels in control of their financial situation.

Thanks to Debt Caseworkers Susan Craddock and Carol Gormal, and Alex Robinson, Debt Casework Assistant. Sadly Susan retired in December 2018 but we are pleased that she has returned as a volunteer. Alex also left us in August 2018 to continue his studies and we were pleased to appoint Kenya Flute to this role. We are also grateful to UEA law students Kezia Battely, Lewis Burgess, Felipe Dissenha, Helaina Mann, Megan Whitaker and Olivia Whitehorn who provided administrative and support work over the last year and who supported the mediation service.

Andy Cobb
Debt Adviser



Above:
Susan Craddock, Debt Caseworker; Julie Bennett, Administrative and Finance Co-ordinator and Flo Baldwin, Administrative Officer; Joanne Freeman and Beccy Branson, Administrative Officers

Casestudy

The client had received a Court enforcement notice for a credit card debt of over £8,000 which had surprised him as although he was named as the defendant, he recollected clearing his credit card in full several years ago and then ending the agreement. He was extremely worried about the whole situation and nervous at the prospect of court proceedings.

It seems that the client had already been to another advice agency who helped him to apply to set the judgment aside. This did occur, but the creditor was invited to reapply for judgement. A further court hearing had thus ensued, and the client was unsure what to do next, the other agency having said they couldn't help any further.

Initially, the creditor had appeared sympathetic to the client's assertion that he must have been a victim of fraud, and agreed to look into the matter. However, they then changed their view, concluding that he probably did owe the money, and that they would continue to argue this in court.

We assisted the client in preparing a witness statement, setting out his argument. The onus of proof should be on the claimant to demonstrate that the debt exists, rather than for the client to disprove it; however, we assisted the client in obtaining evidence in support of his case as a precautionary measure.

At the final hearing, the creditor continued to insist that the client was responsible for the debt, but they admitted that they could not verify that any of the transactions had been authorised by the client. The outcome was that the District Judge concluded that the client had probably been telling the truth, and dismissed the claim. The client commented that he could not possibly have dealt with the matter without NCLS, and that his faith in justice had been restored.

userfeedback

"I cannot thank Andy enough for all of his help and advice. At a time when no-one else could help me, Andy was my financial lifesaver! Your service is invaluable. Many, many thanks."

"Carol did a great job and I stopped receiving the endless debt letters and managed to reach a reasonable payment arrangement with all my debtors."

"When I first came to you I didn't know quite what to expect, losing my home & possessions was on my mind. Then I came to realise there are people who listen and can help change all that."

Welfare Benefits Service



Left: Vaughan Thomas, Welfare Rights Casework Assistant, Charlie Sayer, Welfare Rights Manager & Rob Ireland, Welfare Rights Adviser

clientfeedback

"Thank you for all your help! Your service was better than this form allows you to say! Thanks especially to Susan Killeen"

Our Welfare Benefits Service has had another busy and successful year assisting clients with submission of appeals and representation at Social Security Benefit Tribunals.

Referrals to the Welfare Benefits Service are taken from partner agencies via the NCAN Common Referral System which enables us to manage demand and see clients at the most critical Tribunal stage of their case, where access to specialist advice and representation is most limited.

The innovative partnership between NCLS and the University of East Anglia Law School continues to be utilised to great effect by the Service. Started here in 2012 it is a model of partnership working that has become more widely seen nationally with other Universities and advice providers following suit to plug the hole in accessing advice and justice as a result of reforms implemented by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.

We use a team of volunteer law students in the Welfare Benefits team who undergo training and then work under supervision to assist clients with appeals and Tribunal representation and provide administrative support. In addition, we also have a small team of community volunteers who bring a wide variety of experience to the team, having differing backgrounds and work experience.

The contribution from the students and community volunteers allows NCLS to assist a far greater number of clients than we could do otherwise and the students in turn gain invaluable client care and advocacy experience.

Achievements

Our new client numbers have risen slightly again this year to 310, up from 305 in 2016/17 and from 257 in 2015/16. However our Tribunal numbers have risen significantly with the team representing at 299 Tribunals in 2017/18 up from 225 Tribunals during 2016/17, an increase of 32%.

Total number of Tribunal hearings listed (Apr 2017-Mar 2018)	326
Withdrawn/ceased to act	27
Total number of hearings attended	199
Adjourned/postponed and relisted	69
Allowed/lapsed in favour	188
Dismissed	40
Income generation Apr 2017-Mar 2018	£1,790,753
Income generation total since start of project	£5,604,890

This underplays the figures as we record income generation for one year forwards from the date of Tribunal when in practice many Appellants are given two or three year awards

National Tribunal Trends

Tribunal statistics and waiting times

The Ministry of Justice reports that over the last four quarters (April 17 to March 18) appeal receipts have remained broadly stable (at around 58,000 to 61,000) before falling to 51,200 appeals in the current quarter. However, it notes that as appeal receipts have been consistently higher than disposals over the last two years, by the end of June 2018 there were 124,649 cases outstanding, up 20% compared to the same period in 2017.

In practice that means that Appellants are now waiting an average of 24 weeks for their appeals to reach Tribunal from the point of issue of the appeal papers. For many that is a very long and stressful wait with a greatly reduced income.

DWP presenting officer attendance

The attendance of presenting officers on behalf of the Decision Maker continues to increase with the target to roll attendance out more widely. A recent report to the House of Commons by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) showed 25% of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) appeals for the period of April to December 2017 had a presenting officer in attendance, up from 2% the previous year.

Whilst the role of a presenting officer is to act as a friend to the court, and the Tribunal's role is inquisitorial, there is no doubt that Appellants attending without a representative may feel distressed and at a disadvantage, making access to independent free specialist advice and representation all the more important

National success rates

The new figures for Social Security and Child Support Tribunals (covering April to June 2018) highlight that ESA and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) made up the majority of appeal disposals, with 35% and 46% of the 53,345 appeals disposed of in the quarter respectively. The overturn rate for both PIP and ESA appeals was 71%, compared to an overturn rate for all appeals cleared at a hearing of 67% (up from 63% on the same period in 2017 - an increase attributed to a 6 percentage point increase in the PIP overturn rate over the period).

For other benefits, the overturn rate was 65% (Disability Living Allowance), 55% (Universal Credit), and 36% (Jobseeker's Allowance).

clientfeedback

"Thank you very much indeed for your help and support in taking my son's PIP claim to tribunal and winning it back for him. The service we received from you was wonderful and I do not believe that justice would have been served without you. I cannot thank you enough."

Tribunal reform

HM Courts and Tribunals Reform programme was launched in 2016 with the aim of modernising and upgrading the justice system.

In the Social Entitlement Chamber, one reform programme has been implemented and one programme is in the trial process. Online dispute resolution is also moving ever closer.

The 'Track Your Appeal' programme was implemented at the end of March 2018. This enables Appellants in PIP appeals to track the progress of their appeals online and via a text message service. Whilst this reform can reduce the stress of waiting for a hearing date letter, the programme is only beneficial for Appellants who have access to the internet or a mobile telephone. Often the most vulnerable of Appellants, who are most anxious about the listing of their appeals, do not have access to or are not competent in using the internet and technology.

In May 2018, HMCTS launched a trial online appeal lodging service for claimants wishing to appeal PIP decisions. This programme is beneficial for claimants or their representatives who have access to the internet, but, again, leaves those who are most vulnerable or those without access to technology to deal with a paper form.

Sir Ernest Ryder, Senior President of Tribunals, in a speech to the Administrative Law Bar Association announced that the first online Social Entitlement Chamber hearings would take place from Autumn 2018. This will allow online evidence sharing between the decision making body, the Appellant and the Tribunal and continuous dispute resolution with the Tribunal at an early stage in an attempt to resolve appeals without the need for face-to-face hearings. Sir Ernest Ryder has emphasised that each Tribunal will be free to make use of technology and online hearings only to the extent that they consider it to be proportionate. This will not mark the end of face-to-face hearings, which is welcomed by NCLS.

Impact of austerity

The impact of the Austerity agenda regime was highlighted in the decision making process on benefit claims when it was revealed by a Freedom of Information Request in 2017 that the DWP had a target to uphold 80% of its initial decisions when a claimant requested an internal review of the original decision. Figures show that the DWP exceeded their own target in 2016-2017, upholding 87.5% of decisions on review.

Whilst it is not clear if the intention behind the target was as a budget shrinking measure, comments of Sir Ernest Ryder at a Bar Council pro-bono event in November 2017 highlighted that there was often no legal basis to the decisions being made by the DWP.

This, coupled with the overturn rate of 67% published by HMCTS and NCLS's own success rate of 82.4% demonstrates that it may well be an intention to save costs behind the decision making process.

Thanks

Our thanks go to the following volunteers for have been involved in delivering the service this year:

Oliver Ansty	Sue Killeen
Jack Aynsley	Emma Kiczma-Walsh
Stiofain Barker	Bart Kubiak
Sarah Blunden	Nicholas Mason
Hatti Briggs	Connor McCormick
Ellie Deag-Dubois	Hanna Osica
Sally Earl	Lilika Peutherer
Jordan Essel	Nicholas Price
William Glenwright	Anne Saunderson
Tom Julian	Vaughan Thomas

We would also like to thank Norwich City Council, Norwich Consolidated Charities, UEA, the A B Charitable Trust, the Henry Smith Charity and the Law Society.

Charlie Sayer Welfare Rights Manager

Casestudy

This case study reflects the general pattern of many of our sickness and disability appeal Tribunals.

The client had a history of homelessness, mental health problems, drug dependency as a form of self-medication, had previously lost jobs due to unstable mental health and very little current specialist mental health input due to the pressure on mental health services locally. The client had been found fit for work after a 30 minute face to face assessment with a health care assessor, in this case a physiotherapist, which had resulted in a report that in no way reflected the very signifi-

cant impact of the client's mental health problems on their ability to undertake the work capability assessment activities considered by the DWP. The DWP as a result made a decision that the claimant was fit for work and scored 0 points.

The Tribunal were able to allow the appeal on the basis of the substantial risk to the mental health of the client if they were found fit for work or work related activity. As with many appeals the Tribunal were able to take detailed oral evidence from the client and had the benefit of further medical evidence in the form of a report from mental health services confirming their preliminary involvement and diagnosis and that the client had been wait listed for further specialist treatment. The Tribunal awarded support group with a 24

month review recommendation to allow the Client to have further specialist mental health treatment as a first step towards securing accommodation, and becoming well enough to think about a return to work or work seeking. The income secured was ESA of £127.15 per week plus arrears of £4,500 backdated 8 months to the date of decision under appeal.

As a case it demonstrates the inherent inflexibility of the DWP assessment and decision making and the important role of a right to appeal with an oral hearing, and the exercise of an inquisitorial role by an independent Tribunal.

Domestic Abuse Service



Above:
Judi Lincoln, Advice & Volunteer Manager

solicitorfeedback

"I am very happy to give my time and support to NCLS. The service proves vital for those who once would have qualified for Legal Aid but are now denied access to lawyers on a funded basis. It is an opportunity for us to "give back" and to support the great work being done by NCLS. We also greatly benefit from advising at the sessions, as it's a chance for us to hone our skills as lawyers. The fast paced clinics mean we need to quickly identify the issues and provide concise advice, so our interviewing skills and time management become key. I find the work incredibly satisfying and an essential part of my role as a solicitor.

studentfeedback

"Volunteering on the Domestic Abuse Team with NCLS has been an invaluable experience. It has enabled me to gain a first-hand insight into issues surrounding domestic abuse and family law, and has complemented my studies as well. It has highlighted the importance of raising awareness of domestic abuse and also the impact that legal aid cuts have had on individuals. I have found it personally very fulfilling and it is an experience I will always value.

Service Profile

NCLS provides a weekly Domestic Abuse Advice Service at our Norwich offices. The service gives the client advice on their legal position and an officer from Norwich City Council is available by telephone to advise on future housing options. We also have a direct line to Norfolk Constabulary's Safeguarding Team to liaise about any action the Police are taking.

The legal advice is provided by a rota of experienced solicitors who so generously give their time for free and our thanks go to them.

- Helen Barnes - Haywards Solicitors
- Francesca Easter - Ashtons Legal
- Caroline Eaton - Clapham & Collinge
- Joanna Longe - Longe & Co
- Amanda Maruca - Spire Solicitors
- Belinda Robison - Story & Robison
- Kerry Rowell - Rogers and Norton

The service is supported by UEA Law Students who provide administrative support, follow up and development work and our thanks go to Team Leader Patrycja Zeleznik and Gemma Galletly, Megan Latschrauner and Catherine Lister. The students also attended a number of events run by partner organisations and had the opportunity to attend domestic violence trials at the Courts with Leeway advocates and to shadow housing advisers at Norwich City Council.

Achievements

We assisted 89 clients over the year. Each client has an in-depth interview and is offered a written follow-up, with advice about safeguarding the information. We also provide clients with information around staying safe e.g. ensuring abusers cannot track them via their mobile phones. Clients are often completely unaware of their rights and lack an understanding about the criminality of abuse. Despite the high volume of cases going through the criminal justice system, many women experiencing domestic abuse are too frightened to report the abuse because the perpetrator has threatened them, or they are fearful about what will happen to their children, or simply because they feel stigmatised and ashamed.

We recently expanded the service to provide advice via Skype to clients at Mid Norfolk CAB in Dereham which saves them from having to travel into Norwich and we hope to extend this initiative to other areas.

We are members of the county-wide Community Safety Partnership and the Domestic Abuse Change Programme and contribute to the Office of the Police & Crime

Commissioner for Norfolk's Domestic Abuse Partner Forum. I am the NCLS Domestic Abuse Champion. I attend Norfolk & Suffolk Criminal Justice Board meetings around services for victims of domestic abuse. There is increasing concern about abusers using the Court process to continue the abuse – see the Family Court Support Service report. We also attend events run by the Norfolk Family Justice Board and Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board.

Service Funding

The service currently receives some funding from Norwich Consolidated Charities and is also supported by grants from local authorities towards our core costs.

Aims & Objectives

Research conducted by Women's Aid, Rights of Women and Welsh Women's Aid showed that 60% of women take no further action if they are not eligible for Legal Aid and that delay in seeking the protection of a court can make a victim and her children extremely vulnerable. In Norfolk we have experienced a much larger decline in the numbers of firms providing Legal Aid services than is the case nationally so even if a client is entitled to Legal Aid, there may not be a solicitor available to provide it. We are working with Leeway, the Norfolk and Suffolk domestic abuse charity, and the local Law Society to find ways of addressing this problem. In addition we have been working with the office of the Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner to undertake some research into the impact of this trend. We aim to assist clients in establishing Legal Aid eligibility and help with the evidential requirements. In this way the few firms that offer Legal Aid will have this part of the administration completed for them in order to speed up the process. Our assistance will potentially increase the number of clients that are able to access legal advice and representation, thereby attempting to address the significant gaps in Legal Aid provision.

Judi Lincoln
Advice & Volunteer Manager

clientfeedback

"I found the experience really good, the advice was really helpful. I feel more confident about what I can do about the issues, I feel I know my rights more."

Family Court Support Service



Above: Hannah Hill, Family Court Support Co-ordinator

Rebecca Calthorpe, Family Law Solicitor

Courtfeedback

“The NCLS service has been of great benefit to unrepresented parties. This has had a very positive impact during court hearings for all concerned; they have been able to support parties to focus on the relevant issues in the case, have helped to promote realistic expectations regarding the outcome of directions hearings and have signposted clients to further support where appropriate. We are very fortunate to have such a valuable and efficient service based in Norfolk.”

Sophie Archer, Chair of the family panel

Service Profile

The Family Court Support Service helps separated parents who are going through the courts to make arrangements for seeing their children (Private Law Child Arrangement Orders). There is no Legal Aid available for the majority of these cases and we provide support for clients through Family Court Supporters (McKenzie Friends) - a person who attends court as a non-professional helper to a litigant who does not have legal representation in court.

Achievements

Demand continues to grow for the service. During 2017/18 we supported 141 clients (compared to 125 in 2016/17), with whom we attended a total of 281 hearings (up from 135 in 2016/17).

Our team of eight trained volunteers support clients throughout their Family Court cases. Clients frequently comment on how valuable they find the service, how we have helped them to understand the system and enabled them to represent themselves more effectively. Moreover we are able to save the court's time by helping clients to prepare and keeping them focussed on the children's welfare. This year our volunteers have received training on Factfinding hearings, writing statements and have had the opportunity to visit a Child Contact Centre. We are expanding our team to meet increasing demand and have two new volunteers currently in training.

Thanks to funding from the Access to Justice Foundation and the Falgate Fund we have been able to employ a part time Co-ordinator to manage and support the volunteers and administer the service. This role has been filled for most of this year by Tamsin Roques who is now job sharing with Hannah Hill on her return from maternity leave.

From July 2017 we were very fortunate to have a family solicitor, Rebecca Calthorpe, volunteering for the service two days a week and as from April 2018 managed to identify sufficient funding to employ her on a temporary basis in order to retain her services. This has enabled us to

increase our Free Legal Advice capacity for initial Family advice, to support the volunteers and to give more help to vulnerable clients or those who have complex cases. However, we will only be able to continue to pay for this post longer term if we can secure some dedicated funding.

We have made increasing use of UEA law student volunteers, who have assisted with administration and gained some court experience. Next academic year we aim to have a bigger student team who can attend more hearings as note-takers, enabling the FCSS volunteers to use their time as effectively as possible to support clients.

We continue to liaise regularly with the court's Legal Team Manager and with the Children & Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass). We attend the Norfolk Family Justice Board and have recently made links with young people's charity Break, and with local mediators, to explore possibilities of working together for the benefit of separated families.

We have developed a series of simple written guides for clients on how to complete court forms, what to expect at a hearing, or how to instruct a solicitor – all situations which can be perplexing for clients who have never encountered the legal system before.

Future plans include the development of a website providing local family court information for Norfolk; designing a Contact Book to aid communication and exploring ways to reach potential clients before they apply to Court.

Cafcassfeedback

“The advice, guidance and support provided by Norfolk Community Law Service is invaluable. We have observed the team to play a crucial role in putting parents at ease, ensuring that they understand the process, empowering them to have a voice and encouraging them to remain focussed on the best interests of their child/ren. The team are professional, supportive, adopt a flexible approach and work in partnership with Cafcass to help achieve the best outcomes for children.”

Vincent Callaghan, Senior Service Manager

clientfeedback

“Without your help I don't think I could have got through last year's numerous court hearings and my McKenzie Friend was an absolute star... she gave me the courage to stand up and take on a system I was intimidated by”

Providing Access to Justice & Equality



Left: Tamsin Roques, Family Court Support Co-ordinator

Trends

Recent figures from the Ministry of Justice show that applications to the Family Court are increasing, and that in 80% of private family court cases at least one party is unrepresented. Although in theory Legal Aid is still available for domestic abuse cases, there is a diminishing pool of family solicitors in Norfolk providing Legal Aid (see Domestic Abuse Service report). We have also noticed that family cases are becoming more complex, as evidenced by the large increase in the number of client hearings we have attended. Recent changes to court practices have meant there has been more focus on issues of domestic abuse and Factfinding hearings (usually requiring a whole day in court) are frequently ordered. It is now not unusual for a case to run to four or five hearings before a final order is made.

Funding

Despite the increase in demand, securing continued funding for this service has proved challenging and we have so far only raised a small proportion of the costs for 2018/19. We are hoping to secure renewal of our Access to

Justice Foundation Funding and are currently working on a number of other applications to enable us to continue this much needed service.

Thanks

Thanks go to volunteers Stacey Ashworth, Caroline Ball, Jane Bevan, Rachel Bradshaw, Sara Burcham, Stephen Dwyer, Deryn Hall, Sue Vaughan, Cara Walker; supervising solicitor Francesca Easter; UEA students Rhys Barton and Gabbie Leszko as well as Carmen Busecan, Hanna Osica and Hana El Oakley for their administrative support. We are also grateful for the support of Cafcass and Norwich Combined Court, in particular the Legal Team Manager Sheryl Kinnear.

Judi Lincoln
Advice & Volunteer Manager

volunteerfeedback

"Hugely rewarding, sometimes frustrating, always interesting."

FamilyJusticeBoard feedback

"As Chair of Norfolk Family Justice Board I am keenly aware of the major contribution made by the NCLS Family Court Service to assisting parents and indirectly their children. I have observed myself, and learned from court personnel and magistrates, what a difference it makes when one of the trained and experienced NCLS volunteers is on hand. As pressure on the family court system is growing year on year, it is greatly appreciated by all involved that this service assists the courts in reducing the time needed for each case without impairing the delivery of a fair and just decision."

June Thoburn CBE, Chair Norfolk Family Justice Board

Casestudy

(Names have been changed)

Theresa came to our Free Legal Advice session when she received notice that her ex-partner had applied for a Child Arrangements Order. Theresa's ex had instructed a solicitor but she could not afford legal representation for herself. There was a history of controlling behaviour by Theresa's ex and she was nervous about facing him in court. We arranged for one of our volunteers to attend the hearing with Theresa and they were able to keep her calm and focussed

on the wellbeing of the child. Theresa was then able to access advice from Rebecca, our family solicitor, on how to write her court statement. The same volunteer supported Theresa at her second hearing, which she found very distressing. The father was not willing to reach a compromise over when he should spend time with the child so matters progressed to a contested final hearing. A further meeting was held at NCLS where Rebecca prepared Theresa for

cross-examination and giving evidence. Theresa prepared a contact schedule which offered more time between father and child whilst ensuring he was home in time for bed on school nights. The bench agreed that this schedule was in the best interests of the child. Theresa wrote afterwards: *'Thank you so much for all your help and support through such a difficult time in my life. Also a special thank you to my supporter who made me brave!'*



Above: Sarah Clack, Operations Manager

Housing Mediation Service

Housing Mediation Service

NCLS runs a twice monthly Mediation Service at the County Court in partnership with Norwich City Council and HM Courts Service. We assist City Council tenants who are in rent arrears by giving advice at an in-depth interview with the aim of preventing them from being brought before the Court in formal possession proceedings. This saves them the distress and anxiety of a court hearing, where the Court can order possession, as well as a significant court fee.

We advise the tenants and mediate on their behalf with the Council to try to agree a suitable repayment arrangement. We are grateful to UEA law students Kezia Battley, Lewis Burgess, Felipe Dissenha, Helaina Mann, Megan Whitaker and Olivia Whitehorn who provided administrative and support work over the last year.

Achievements

In 2017/18 the service saw 73 clients. In over 66% of cases the Council needed to take no further action as the repayment arrangements were adhered to so the service assists the prevention of homelessness.

From the beginning of the financial year we started to see the impact of the Benefit Cap being reduced to £20,000 in November 2016, with some households suddenly finding their income reduced by up to £90 a week causing financial difficulties and often rising debt. Around a third of the clients seen were referred to the NCLS Debt Service for further holistic support.

Andy Bays, the City Council's Housing Income Manager, said *'The past year has proved successful once again with around two thirds of clients using the service being able to avoid possession action due to their arrears. The service remains a vital resource for Norwich Council tenants in the wake of the Government's austerity and welfare reform*

studentfeedback

'At NCLS, I learned many invaluable skills which will serve me well in the workplace. I learnt how to work effectively as part of a team, how to interview clients in a manner which was sensitive and effective and how to write formal letters to clients. It also gave me a fantastic insight into what a career in the law would be like, so volunteering with NCLS was a beneficial experience.'

programmes. Coupled with the rollout of the 'full' Universal Credit service in Norwich from October, the future may become even more challenging; we therefore look forward to continuing our valuable partnership.'

The students supporting this service also attended Housing Possession hearings at the Court and had placements with the Council's Income Team and Housing Advice drop in service.

Service Funding

We are grateful for the funding we receive from the City Council towards the cost of this service.

Aims & Objectives

In the coming year we anticipate seeing further challenges for tenants as Universal Credit is rolled out. We have already seen clients where the housing element of Universal Credit is paid directly to the Council and this is causing difficulties when the client's income fluctuates regularly and so they do not know how much of their rent has been covered and how much they are meant to pay as a top up.

Our main aim for the coming year is to continue to deliver an in-depth service and do more follow-up work with clients including, wherever appropriate, referring them to our Free Legal Advice, Debt and Welfare Benefit Services.

Sarah Clack
Operations Manager

Judi Lincoln
Advice & Volunteer Manager

clientfeedback

"You have helped my family and are highly recommended. Thank you"

"Thanks for all you did for me"

Casestudy

(Names have been changed)

David came to see us when his arrears were around £700. He had lived in his 2 bedroomed Norwich City Council property since 2010. His income comes from his wages from two jobs, both of which are seasonal and have fluctuating hours. He is also on Universal Credit with the housing element being paid directly to the Council.

As David's hours fluctuate his Universal Credit, which is linked to his income, also changes each month. However David is not notified of how much is going to the Council towards his rent so he is finding it difficult to keep track of how much he needs to pay. Added to this, David gets paid from each of his jobs and from his Universal Credit at different frequencies, making it hard for him to manage his money. He has been trying his best to keep on top of his rent payments but his arrears have gradually been creeping up.

We spoke to the Council and helped David come to an agreement to pay back his rent arrears, making payments every 2 weeks to tie in with when he receives his wages. However due to the situation with his benefits he would have to call them every month to check how much he was going to have to pay.

Whilst David is very keen to clear his debt he is likely to struggle to keep up on his payments due to his fluctuating income. This is because his Universal Credit will go down the month after his wages have increased due to the time it takes to action changes, the knock on effect of this is that the weeks he needs to pay more his income may have decreased again so he will struggle to meet these payments.



Norfolk Community Advice Network



Above: Emily Balsdon, NCAN Coordinator
Janka Rodziejcz, NCAN Strategy
Manager

Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN) is an alliance of over 50 Social Welfare Advice agencies, together with local authority representatives and private solicitors (that provide some free or voluntary legal advice), led by a Steering Group of providers comprising NCLS, Norfolk, Mid-Norfolk and Diss and Thetford Citizens Advice, Age UK Norfolk and Age UK Norwich, Shelter, Mancroft Advice Project and Equal Lives. NCLS is the lead agency employing NCAN members of staff.

The aim of NCAN is to ensure that Norfolk residents can access good quality, social welfare information, advice, assistance and representation at a time or place when they need those most. NCAN seeks to achieve this aim through:

- Improving the client journey
- Ensuring best practice
- Supporting the sector to be strategic and collaborative
- Supporting the sector to be cost effective
- Ensuring the sector has a voice at strategic level

NCAN's Activity

In pursuit of these aims, over the past year we have been:

Progressing NCAN's No Wrong Door approach, in order to improve the ease with which clients are able to reach the correct provider for all their needs, with minimum need to repeat their story. For example:

- We have increased the organisations and teams using the NCAN referral system from 30 to 57.
- We have increased the use of the NCAN referral system among public-sector partners. We have, for example, piloted the use of the NCAN referral system among Adult Social Services teams, supporting the referral of clients ineligible for social care into other advice and support services.
- We have provided training to Norfolk Constabulary Central Control Room staff on advice and other services available in Norfolk. This is to support improved signposting for clients calling regarding non-police matters.
- In January 2018, in partnership with Living Wage Norwich and a Steering Group of organisations, we organised a Social Justice Conference bringing together 165 representatives of organisations and services in Norfolk. This conference sought to develop stronger links and networks between local agencies that work in the area of social justice to improve access to services.

Supporting the development of Social Prescribing in Norfolk, as an extension of NCAN's No Wrong Door approach. Social prescribing, as defined by The King's Fund, "is a means of enabling GPs, nurses and other primary care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services. Recognising that people's health is determined primarily by a range of social, economic and environmental factors, social prescribing seeks to address people's needs in a holistic way".

We have, therefore, engaged in a range of activity to support the development of Social Prescribing in Norfolk, and to advocate for the central role of advice:

- In July, we organised a Social Prescribing Conference to bring together 76 representatives of public and voluntary sector organisations to explore approaches to social prescribing and learn from the existing and recent projects in Norfolk.
- We have contributed to a wide range of meetings across Norfolk that have developed Social Prescribing projects across the five Clinical Commissioning Groups.
- We have supported advice-sector and public-sector partners to develop an advice-based approach to Social Prescribing in Norwich and Broadland.
- We supported the delivery of Social Prescribing projects in Gurney Surgery and Lakenham in Norwich, in partnership with Norfolk Citizens Advice, Age UK Norwich, Equal Lives, Mancroft Advice Project, NCLS and Shelter. Although referrals in to the project were low the result for clients and surgeries were positive. The Gurney Surgery project, for example, resulted in a 44% reduction in average monthly appointments for patients who had accessed Social Prescribing.

Ongoing campaigning on behalf of the Norfolk Advice Sector, including at a national Social Finance roundtable on legal advice and representation.

Challenging Welfare Reform: NCAN has been working with Equal Lives to bring together representatives from throughout the region, including DWP, Maximus and local authorities, to explore the practical application of Universal Credit and the impact of recent changes. Our hope is that dialogue leads to improved outcomes for claimants. One outcome of this work has been the development of pro forma to gather evidence of issues in order to support the exploration of systematic resolutions.

Staff and Volunteers

We were very pleased to welcome Emily Balsdon as the new NCAN Co-ordinator in November 2017.

We would like to thank all the volunteers who have worked with us this year, without whom we would not be able deliver our mission. Namely:

- Our communications volunteers Ogechi U. Akuburo and Sebastian Firrell.
- Our Impact and Analysis volunteers Max Crowley, Emily Frost, Sive

Poto, Luke Osborne, Olivia Yisiqi Wang, and a particular thank you to James Massey for all his analytical support.

- Our IT volunteers Mark Wilson, Seco Djalo and Simon Blackwood. Particular thanks go to Peter Moore who has gone above and beyond to support us in the delivery of our NCAN Referral System.

Future funding

The widened use of the NCAN referral system by statutory authorities has continued to result in funding that subsidises NCAN's costs and keeps the system free for the voluntary sector. We are delighted that Norfolk County Council have recently decided to fund NCAN in the 2018/19 financial year to support referrals from Norfolk County Council into Social Prescribing projects. We were also extremely appreciative of Norwich City Council's increased funding for NCAN, to reflect NCAN's involvement in supporting the Financial Inclusion Consortium.

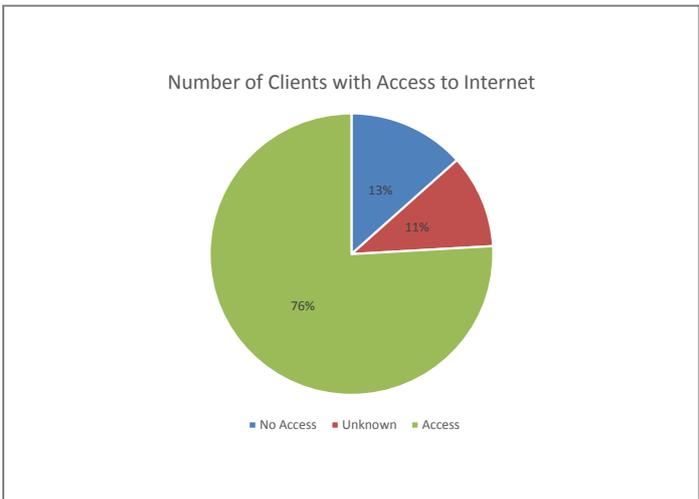
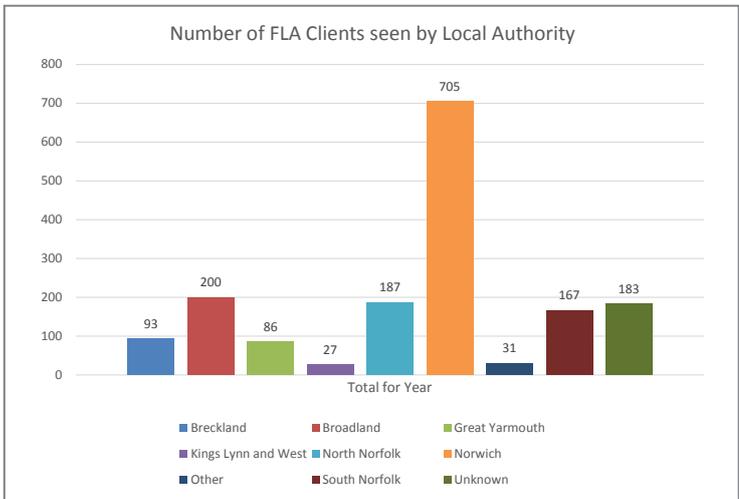
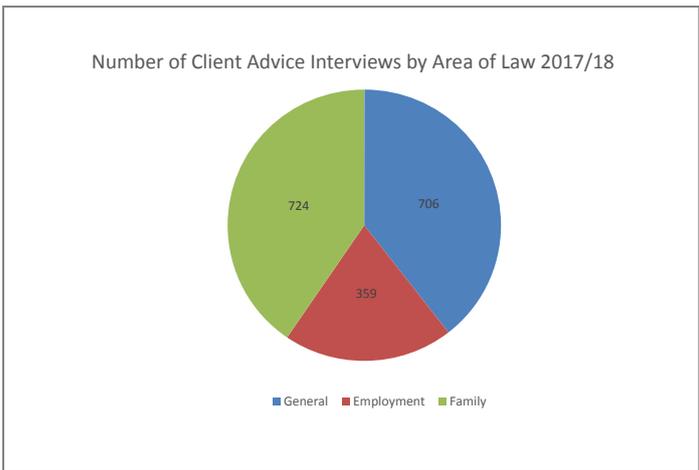
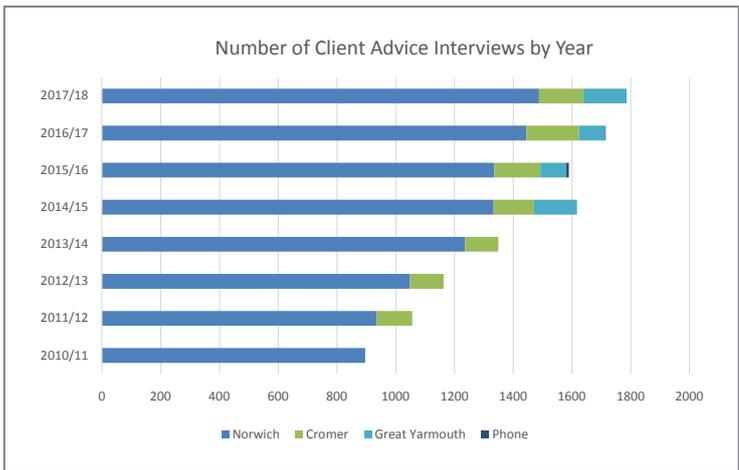
We encourage all partner agencies when making funding bids to include provision for NCAN support, particularly regarding use of the Directory and Referral System and support for outcome measurements.

Janka Rodziewicz
NCAN Strategy Manager

Free Legal Advice Service Statistics

The charts on this page show the number of Free Legal Advice client interviews carried out in Norwich, Cromer and Great Yarmouth each of the last 7 financial years.

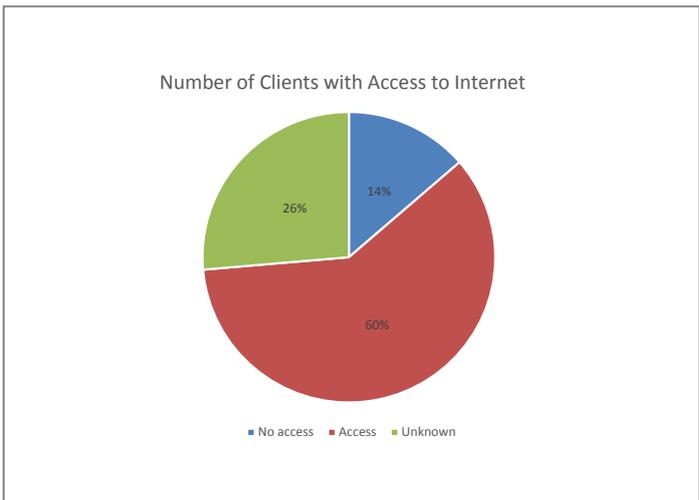
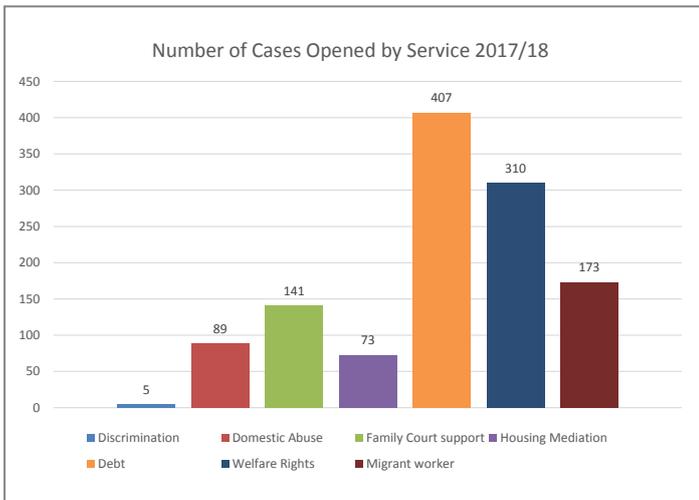
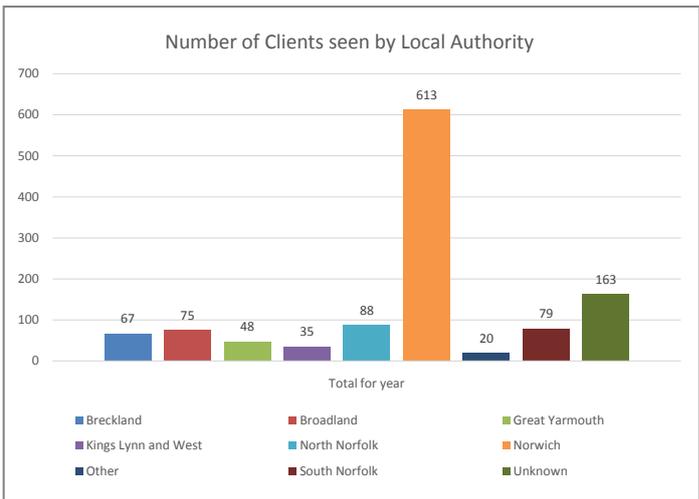
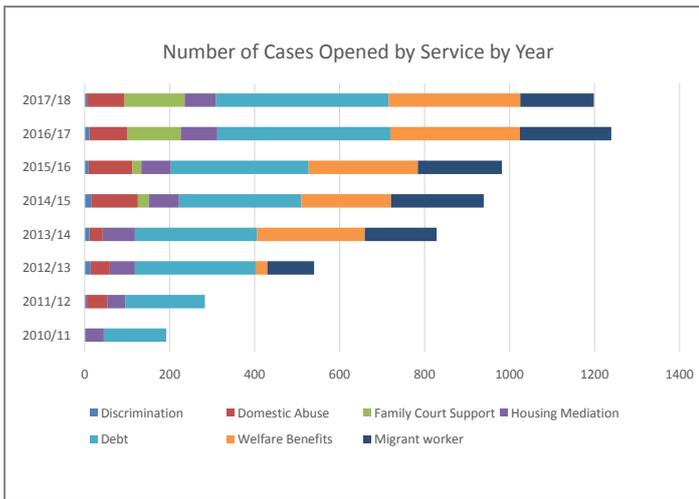
They also show a breakdown of the client interviews in 2017/18 by area of law, the number of clients seen by local authority and those who have access to the internet.



Other Services Statistics

The charts on this page show the number of cases opened by our Non-FLA services in each of the last 7 financial years.

They also show a breakdown of cases by service in 2017/18, a breakdown of the number of the clients across all these services by local authority and those who have access to the internet.





Above: Vanessa Morton,
Chair of the Supporters Group

Supporters of NCLS

The Supporters' Group, established in 2010, act as "friends" of NCLS, aiming to promote the work of the organisation as well as to raise funds to help continue and expand its services.

Most prestigious of our fund-raising events are our annual public lectures which focus on key issues concerning social justice, contribute to information and debate, and raise the profile of our charity. In November 2017, we were delighted to welcome Martha Spurrier, Director of Liberty, who spoke on "Human Rights and Access to Justice in a post-Brexit World." Martha has had an astonishing career already - called to the Bar at 24, twice shortlisted for Legal Aid Lawyer of the year, and fighting cases involving the rights of immigration detainees, mental health patients, prisoners and women and children at national and international level in her role at Doughty's Chambers. She spoke with immense power of the curtailment of human rights in dark corners of our current systems - for example the conditions of immigration detainees - and the further threats potentially posed by Brexit. Her lecture was warmly received and we were most grateful for the support of the Norfolk and Norwich Law Society which helped to make the event a big success.

In December we held a very enjoyable winter social evening at the Virgin Money Lounge, with brilliant music by Andy Cobb, Adam Clark and Joe Morris. This was the first event we had held at the Lounge, and we were well supported by the staff there.

Our highly popular and very successful quiz was held at the Unthank Arms in March 2018, and in May we welcomed NCLS supporters and their guests to the Bishop's Garden for an evening reception, with speeches focusing on our much needed and very effective Welfare Rights service. As usual we contributed a team to the Norwich Legal Walk which was organised by the Eastern Legal Support Trust. Staff also raised money for NCLS through their Great Legal Bake and very successful Scavenger Hunt and fielded a team for the Law Society's Countdown.

Our thanks to all our volunteers at events including UEA Law students, staff and other NCLS volunteers. A big thank you to our lecturer, Martha Spurrier, and to Bishop Graham and his staff for their generosity and help with our spring event. We would like to thank all the talented people who give their time to support us, particularly our quiz experts Robert and Lorraine Ewell, to William Armstrong, our Honorary President, to NCLS managers and staff for the events they organise. We also very much appreciate the generosity of our donors, sponsors and partners for events, including the Norfolk and Norwich Law Society, Virgin Money Lounge and local shops and businesses who have most kindly contributed raffle prizes for events.

We always need more help and ideas for fundraising and promotion! You can contact me via supporters@ncls.co.uk. You can also support NCLS through a regular subscription or donation. Please visit the Supporters page on the NCLS website.

Vanessa Morton
Chair of the Supporters' Group

Thank You

The Board of NCLS would like to thank the following for their generous support during 2017/18. Without the continuing support of our funders, supporting organisations, local legal firms and our volunteers, we would not have been able to continue to provide the level of services we do.

Funding Bodies and Sponsors

- Norwich Consolidated Charities
- Norwich City Council
- Broadland District Council
- Norfolk County Council
- Big Lottery Fund
- Money Advice Service
- Comic Relief
- Norfolk & Norwich Law Society
- University of East Anglia
- Legal Education Foundation
- Mancroft Advice Service
- Mid-Norfolk CAB
- North Norfolk District Council
- Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council
- Cromer Town Council
- Eastern Legal Support Trust
- Access to Justice Foundation
- A B Charitable Trust
- Henry Smith Charity
- Victory Housing Trust
- Shaw Trust
- Falgate Fund
- Law Society Charity
- West Norfolk CCG
- Healthy Norwich CCG
- Mills & Reeve

Free Legal Advice & Domestic Abuse Rotas

All those firms and their solicitors who have so generously contributed to the Free Legal Advice and Domestic Abuse Rotas and also LawWorks, as well as Suffolk Law Centre for providing our Discrimination Service.

Volunteers

All our volunteer advisers, law students, volunteer receptionists and administrators for their hard work and commitment throughout the year.

Sponsorship in Kind

- Spire Solicitors for use of their Boardroom & DX facilities.
- Great Yarmouth Borough Council & Norfolk CAB for use of an interview room.

Individual Support

- The staff and volunteers of Voluntary Norfolk at St Clements House.

Other Partner Organisations

All our partner organisations in Norfolk and regionally for their support and co-operation, particularly Norfolk, Mid-Norfolk & Diss & Thetford CABx, Age UK Norwich, Age UK Norfolk, Shelter, MAP, Equal Lives, ACCESS, and also Advice Services Alliance, CitA and Advice UK.

**St Clements House
2-16 Colegate
Norwich
NR3 1BQ**

**NORFOLK
COMMUNITY
LAW SERVICE**

Registered in England Company no. 3524607 Charity no. 1069066

"Providing Access to Justice & Equality"

Tel: 01603 496623 • Fax: 01603 618320 • info@ncls.co.uk • www.ncls.co.uk

FREE LEGAL ADVICE

15 Minutes free legal advice with a solicitor

Family & General advice drop-in Tuesdays

Employment and General advice drop-in on Fridays

You can register from 10.30am, appointments are limited and allocated on a first come, first served basis.

The advice session starts at 12pm

Also by appointment at Cromer and Great Yarmouth

FREE DEBT ADVICE

For vulnerable people or those with complex needs, including offenders, ex-offenders and their families

FREE WELFARE BENEFIT ADVICE

Advice and representation for welfare benefit appeals

FREE LEGAL ADVICE FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Appointments with a solicitor on Wednesday mornings

FREE DISCRIMINATION ADVICE

Provided by Suffolk Discrimination Law Service. For appointments call 01473 408111

FREE ADVICE FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Advice on residency, status and entitlement for EEA Nationals

Advice and representation for welfare benefit appeals

FREE FAMILY COURT SUPPORT SERVICE

Support for parents seeking child contact through the Courts

FREE RENT ARREARS MEDIATION SERVICE

For Norwich City Council (NCC) tenants. This service is accessed by referral from NCC only

Interpreters are available for all our services by arrangement



We hold the Advice Quality Standard Mark



Authorised by the OISC to provide immigration advice and services Ref. No. N201200043



Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority Ref. No. 620093

Donations to support NCLS can be made via:

www.btplc.com/mydonate, www.localgiving.com or www.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/ncls

Thank you to all our funders who include

