



## NCLS CELEBRATES SUCCESSES AT AGM

In October NCLS held our AGM looking back at 2021/22.

Clare Carter, Joint CEO of the Access to Justice Foundation was the keynote speaker and highlighted their 'Defending the Public Purse' research that showed that each client accessing legal advice saved the Treasury £8,000.

Over the course of the year we dealt with just over 9,000 enquiries- helping 3,269 clients with just under 4,000 legal issues- up 24% on the previous year. 26% of clients report they have mental ill health; 31% are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The Welfare Benefits team secured £1.1 million pounds worth of benefits for disabled clients, winning 74% of all appeals. The Debt service wrote off or renegotiated just under £2 million pounds worth of debt. The average amount of debt held by our clients with has increased by 64% up to £7,277 from £4,429. The Immigration service worked tirelessly to help EU citizens meet the Brexit deadline of end of June 2021 and this helped almost double the number of clients than previously. The Family service saw a 144% increase in Family Court hearings and their McKenzie friends helped at 166 hearings.

The Free Legal Advice clinics helped more than 1,600 clients. These clinics only happen because of the commitment of Norfolk's legal community- dedicated to *pro bono* and to justice.

Jane Basham, NCLS CEO outlined two successful new projects that were created as a direct response to the pandemic. The Women's Debt Service and the Mobile Legal Adviser. She also spoke about future plans to build the capacity of Immigration advice and prepare for a Legal Aid contract in 2024.

The AGM was closed with the words of a client: a mother whom NCLS had helped secure a higher rate Disability Living Award for her son.

"I couldn't even describe how much they have changed our lives. Even a month later after the Tribunal, Charlie went over and beyond for us in any way she could, such as telling us about qualifying for food vouchers. They are amazing, they are absolutely amazing."

More details on how we helped this client can be found in the case study on page 2.



Left to right Clare Carter, Jane Basham, Mayor of Norwich Kevin Maguire, NCLS Trustee Aqmar Zakaria, Chair Sarah Blunden, Treasurer and Vice Chair David Butler



## HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS ISSUE

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## CASESTUDY: WELFARE BENEFITS TEAM HELPS WITH DLA APPEAL

Chloe\* asked NCLS for help on behalf of her son Harry\*, for a Disability Living Allowance appeal. Harry has autism and faces many difficulties every day. Chloe wanted Harry to secure a high rate mobility award, which involves very complex process and is hard to obtain, both for children of his age and based on autism.

Her initial application was denied by the DWP and NCLS took it to Tribunal and represented Harry and Chloe, where the award was eventually allowed.

### What was it that made you need NCLS's help?

My son is autistic (he's 6 now, but he was 3 when I first needed their help). The DWP kept declining him DLA high mobility rate, the award I thought it was fair for him to get considering all the difficulties he faces every day. That's why I phoned for help. I spoke to Charlie about it (in the Welfare Benefits team) and she agreed with me and said they would help.

### What were you expecting from NCLS when you first approached them?

I had a notepad with me because I was expecting Charlie to give me a bit of advice then send me away. I work full time and have two children, and I have Crohn's Disease. I was feeling very stressed by all this. At the end Charlie said she had a list of what she was going to do and what I needed to do, and that took a lot of the pressure off me.

### What were you hoping might happen?

All I wanted was for someone to agree with me, to make me feel I wasn't going crazy. I needed someone to help me who had the knowledge behind them.

### What did the advice sessions "look like"?

Because it all happened during Covid, everything was on the phone or on the computer. Charlie represented me in a Tribunal and I still hadn't met her. It was all online. I wouldn't know what she looks like!

### How did you feel about your situation before you got the advice? How are you feeling about it now?

I was feeling extremely stressed, anxious and worried, **so** overwhelmed. When we won the Tribunal I felt like the luckiest person alive. I couldn't believe we had done it. I felt like all the gods had answered my prayers by giving me Charlie!

### How did getting this advice change things for you and Harry?

It took so long to hear us in Court, because they kept making mistakes at their end. I couldn't wait to get the letter confirming it. So by the time I actually got around to hearing that we had won, it was just one less huge worry that we have had to deal with every day. It's not only financially, it's housing, it's schooling, it's everything to do with his life. Now we are getting support on *everything*.

\*names have been changed

## NCLS AIMS FOR BETTER IMPACT!

Accurately recording volunteer hours is not an easy task but it is important. It is essential data for our funding applications and useful for volunteer references and employability. Most of all though, it's critical to ensure that we fully understand and appreciate the enormous contribution made by volunteers to NCLS.

In order to record this data, NCLS recently invested in new volunteer management software called Better Impact. This programme enables student and community volunteers to quickly and easily record their hours through a personalised NCLS volunteer portal or via the MyImpact app on their phone. Better Impact administrators can easily run reports by team, for a certain time period or for an individual volunteer if they are requesting a reference.

Since the introduction of Better Impact on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2022, 61 student and community volunteers have

recorded **1,556** hours on the system (to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022). This includes 655 hours from our Legal Services volunteers who assist us to deal with over 700 telephone calls, emails and web enquiries per month and 355 hours for our Family team who support unrepresented clients in the Family Court. We're delighted with the way that volunteers have engaged with Better Impact and know that this will be incredibly useful data. Keep an eye on our website ([www.ncls.co.uk](http://www.ncls.co.uk)) for volunteering opportunities at NCLS or email Volunteer Co-ordinator Jess Belmonte on [jess@ncls.co.uk](mailto:jess@ncls.co.uk).



## NCLS APPOINTS NEW CHAIR

In March 2022, NCLS bid a fond farewell to Ben Keane who retired after more than 20 years as the Chair of the Board of Trustees. Ben, a solicitor at Spire, joined the board of NCLS in the year 2000 and was appointed as Chair in 2001.

During his time at NCLS he has shown an unstinting commitment to justice and to the principle that everyone, regardless of their means to pay, should understand and assert their legal rights. He has guided and supported NCLS through periods of significant change, including office moves, enormous disruption to the legal landscape and the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also of note that, since joining the Board in the year 2000, Ben has never missed a meeting!

The position of Chair has been filled by Sarah Blunden, who was unanimously elected and chaired her first meeting in May 2022. Sarah has been on the Board since 2014 and is an active community volunteer with our Welfare Benefits team. Previously she was an advice manager at Citizens Advice for 12 years and is currently a lay member of the Employment Tribunal and a magistrate.

Sarah takes on this role at an ever more challenging time. She states *“The future for justice nationally and locally have never looked more uncertain. The need for the services NCLS provides is greater than it ever was. We shall continue to work to plug the gap of unmet need across Norfolk”*.



Sarah Blunden, NCLS Chair

## NORFOLK ADVICE AGENCIES DECLARE A COST-OF-LIVING EMERGENCY

NCAN's Steering Group, which represents 100+ free legal and social welfare advice and support providers, including NCLS, has written to Norfolk's local authorities, statutory agencies and funding partners, to declare that a cost-of-living emergency is unfolding across the county.

This year NCAN advice charities saw a **405%** increase in the average value of secured loans debt (an average £5,821 is owed per person, compared with last year's £1,151). A **1,300%** increase was reported in those requesting help with debt assessments and a similar increase in demand for charitable support and foodbank parcels. Three times as many young people have been asking for help with homelessness compared to last year. Direct referrals have increased **68%** compared to this time last year.

CEOs who are on the Steering Group of NCAN reported that the stories they are hearing every day about people's suffering – relating to food and fuel poverty, hardship around basic living costs and its impact on mental health – were “unbearable”.

Emily Balsdon, Director of NCAN, said:

*“NCAN has never seen a higher level of demand for free legal and social welfare advice and humanitarian support services, not even during the pandemic. This is all before the impact of the next wave of cost-of-living increases and interest rate rises expected this winter. Our advice providers are buckling under the pressure of this excess demand, with some already unable to respond to everyone who needs help.*

*This is a humanitarian emergency and we must all respond accordingly, with urgency and determination. Without immediate additional resourcing, many of our member agencies/ organisations will need to stop seeing new clients, and this would have devastating consequences for Norfolk people facing an emergency such as domestic abuse, homelessness, secured debt, food or fuel poverty.”*

NCAN's joint letter to local authorities, statutory agencies and funders asked for action to stem the emergency, such as:

- Looking at all budgets to consider the prioritisation of frontline advice services.
- Reviewing contingency funding allocations and making awards to advice charities.
- Helping NCAN to find *and* fund more advisers, being mindful that introducing new advisers requires training, which takes time *and* has additional cost implications.

The full Declaration of Emergency Letter can be found [here](#).



## FROM SUPERSTAR VOLUNTEER TO SENSATIONAL SOLICITOR

Hana Suzuki, NCLS's new Social Welfare solicitor is a shining example of potential realised through volunteering and an individual inherently committed to access to justice for all.

Hana started her journey with NCLS as a volunteer in 2010. NCLS at the time, was a small charity that occupied only four rooms at Boardman House and employed less than ten staff. In the same year Hana became part of the Admin team.

In 2015 she started training as an Immigration Adviser with Des McKeating one day a week and in 2016 Hana qualified as a OISC Level 1 Immigration Adviser and worked full time alongside Des in the Immigration team.

In late 2019, Hana was offered a training contract through the Justice First Fellowship, funded by the Legal Education Foundation. This project aims to create a lasting legacy of Social Welfare solicitors. Hana started her training in early 2020. She took up seats in Immigration, Welfare Benefits, Discrimination, Civil Litigation and Family.

In addition, both Hana and Des passed their OISC Level 2 exam in April 2020 expanding the work NCLS could undertake in the Immigration Team to issues of more complexity.

Hana qualified as a solicitor in early 2022 and accepted her role as a dedicated Social Welfare Law solicitor at NCLS in April. She is currently assisting with issues dealing with Domestic Abuse, Immigration and Welfare Benefits as well as raising awareness and offering training around victims of domestic abuse and no recourse to public funds. Hana is very passionate about empowering people and enabling them to understand and exercise their rights.



Hana Suzuki, Social Welfare Solicitor

## LONG STANDING MEMBER OF SUPPORTERS GROUP STEPS DOWN

We were sad to say “Goodbye” to a long-serving stalwart of the Supporters’ Group this month: Vanessa Morton has decided to step down having also given NCLS magnificent service as a Trustee Board member for many years.

Vanessa has been a particularly “hands-on” member, at the forefront of organising and promoting the many fundraising events and lectures we have put on over the years, so we will miss her energy, enthusiasm and can-do attitude as we rebuild our efforts on the Group after the hiatus of the pandemic.

Many thanks Vanessa from all of us at NCLS.

## NORWICH BECOMES A LIVING WAGE CITY

A coalition of local businesses, charities and public sector organisations - including NCLS - has launched a plan to substantially increase the number of accredited Living Wage Employers in Norwich.

The ‘Making Norwich a Living Wage City’ Action Group has today been recognised by the Living Wage Foundation. Their plan will see employers encouraged to pay the real Living Wage and become Living Wage Employers, ensuring all employees are paid what they need to get by.

NCLS's CEO, Jane Basham, said: *“A real living wage matters now more than ever, as the cost-of-living surges and workers struggle to keep their heads above water. We see clients every day at NCLS who are the working poor - impacted by low pay, zero hours and uncertain employment contracts, benefit cuts and unaffordable rents. People who work should be able to enjoy a decent standard of living and not be forced to work excessive hours or take on multiple jobs just to get by. We believe a real living wage is the basis for a fair and equal society and here at NCLS we wear our ‘Living Wage’ badge with pride.”*



## NCLS SAYS THANK YOU - PRO BONO WEEK 2022

Pro Bono Week took place from 7<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> November 2022. Its purpose is to celebrate and support the voluntary contribution made by the legal profession across the UK in providing free legal advice and representation.

NCLS relies on over 60 volunteer solicitors who take part in our Free Legal Advice clinics on family law, general (civil) law and employment law. During 2021/22 they donated 940 hours of time in which they advised 1,644 clients. To champion the work of these volunteers, during Pro Bono Week and beyond, NCLS has developed a new webpage featuring pictures and quotes which can be seen [here](#).

Here's a taste of the reasons they give for volunteering with NCLS:

*"I have volunteered with NCLS for four years and hope to for many more to come. I can see the benefit of their services at every session I attend, for individuals that do not know where else to turn.*

*The impact of their work, in a time where legal aid is limited and the cost of living is increasing, is hugely important to Norfolk."*

Laura Clay-Harris – FM Family Law



*"I have provided free advice via the Family Free Legal Advice Service for approximately two years. I am passionate about access to justice and the work Norfolk Community Law Service do is vital in helping those in our community who would not otherwise be able to access legal support and advice."*

Frances Bailey – Mills and Reeve LLP

*"I have been a solicitor volunteer on the free legal advice rota since 2015. As with the other volunteers, I believe in the crucial importance of assisting the economically and socially vulnerable members of our society to understand, and thus enforce, the legal rights to which we are all entitled."*

Adam Blenkinsop – Birketts LLP



If you know anyone who may be interested in joining the free legal advice rota at NCLS, please ask them to contact Jess Belmonte, Operations and Volunteer Co-ordinator on [jess@ncls.co.uk](mailto:jess@ncls.co.uk).

## THE GREAT LEGAL BAKE 2022

As part of Pro Bono Week 2022, NCLS staff got their aprons and oven gloves out to whip up sweet treats (and some savoury ones!) for the Great Legal Bake! This made a welcome return after a gap of three years, and is a campaign run by the Access to Justice Foundation.

Up for grabs were classics like carrot cakes, flapjacks and cheese straws alongside some more unusual offerings such as bronuts (a brownie in the shape of a donut) and rugelach (small pastries with jam and nuts). Vegan and gluten free options ensured that everyone could get involved and enjoy a treat.

Our UEA student volunteers working in Legal Services assisted us to make deliveries to local law firms.

Particular thanks to Hatch Brenner and Simper Law for their large orders! In total we raised £160 for NCLS and had a very enjoyable day.



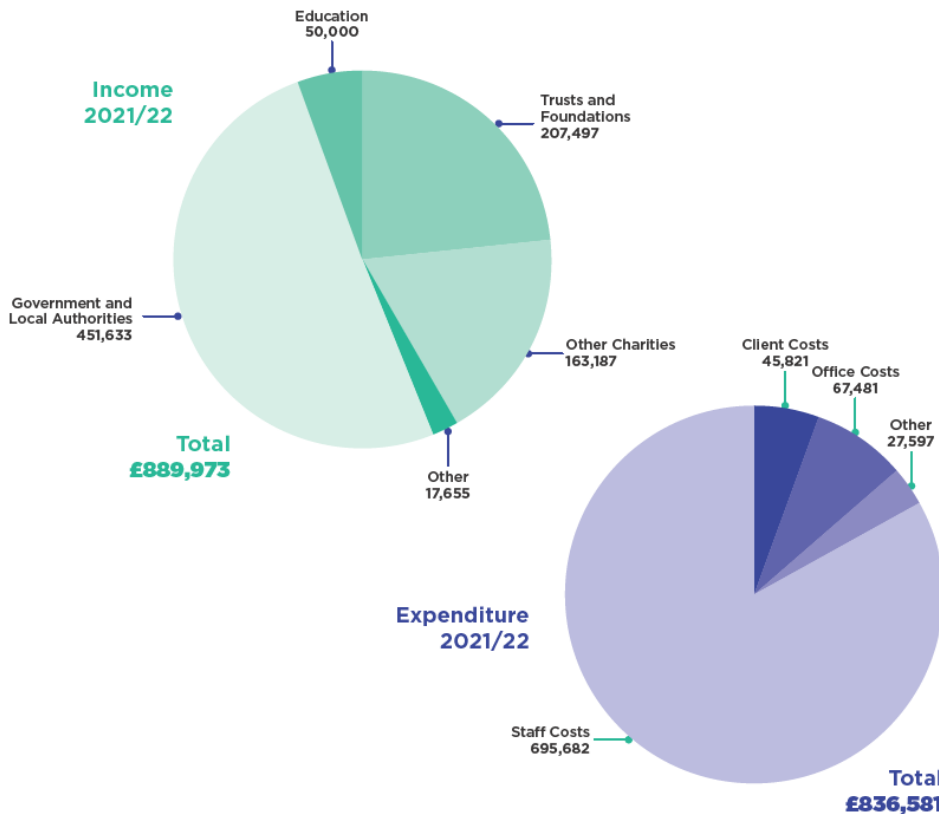
## NCLS'S FINANCES 2021/22

The year ended March 2022 was one still dominated by the after-effects of the pandemic, and real operational challenges. However, from the perspective of fund-raising it was a tremendous success.

The challenge we face every year is that only a small proportion of our income is received under agreements that last over several years. This required a continued, year-round, fund-raising effort resulting in our dedicated team growing annual income by 10% and delivering a surplus for the second year in a row.

Our revenue reserves of £300,000, after taking account of £45,000 which is represented by fixed assets and therefore not distributable, cover around four months of budgeted expenditure – which is at the top of our target minimum range but doesn't allow much room for manoeuvre.

However, our costs rose by almost 20% last year – largely from higher staff numbers as we launched the Mobile Legal Adviser service and beefed-up capability across most of the other teams in response to the increased demand on our people. We continue to be a proud "Living Wage" employer and awarded all our staff an extra pay rise in October because of the cost-of-living pressures that were perhaps not so extreme when we set the budget and pay levels in March.



## DONATE TO NCLS

Our work is funded by grants, fundraising and the generosity of individuals and organisations without which we would not be able to do the work we do.

Donations can be made by cheque sent to our office or online by scanning the below QR code.



## CHRISTMAS OPENING HOURS

We are closed from 5pm on Friday 23rd December until 9.30am on Tuesday 3rd January 2023.

**From all at NCLS we wish you a Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year**

SPONSORED BY birkettes

**SAVE THE DATE**

NORFOLK COMMUNITY LAW SERVICE SUPPORTERS GROUP

**QUIZ NIGHT**

9<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2023

THE UNTHANK ARMS NR2 2DR

ALL PROCEEDS GOING TO NCLS

DETAILS TO FOLLOW IN THE NEW YEAR...

## JUDI LINCOLN WINS OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION AWARD



NCLS was delighted to attend the Norfolk and Norwich Law Society Annual dinner - especially as Hana Suzuki (our Social Welfare Solicitor), Rebecca Calthorpe (our Family solicitor) and our Legal Services Team had been nominated for awards.

We were delighted to see Judi Lincoln (our former Advice and Volunteer Manager who retired in April) receive a special award and the recognition she deserves. Judi received an award for her outstanding contribution to the Norfolk Legal Community. In accepting her award, and in true Judi style, she managed to squeeze in a plea for solicitors to join our FLA clinic rota. Well done Judi!

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

I have decided to retire at the end of April. I had always planned to stay much longer. I had a plan and a clear path. Sometimes life just chucks things at you, knocks you off course and then, as you find your way again, different paths emerge. I cannot really express just how much I love this job and the amazing people I get to work with every day. NCLS and the team of staff and volunteers live the values and have all the skills that I think are needed to create a fair and just society. Non-judgemental, supportive, compassionate, kind, anti-racist, open, clever, dedicated, hardworking, flexible, articulate, empathetic, warm and funny. Then there are the amazing baking skills and tremendous capacity to eat cake, sweets and biscuits! I shall really miss them and you, our excellent supporters.

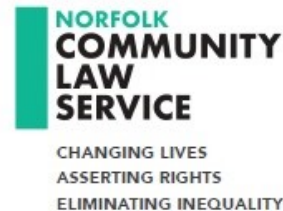


I know the work of NCLS and the people we help really matter. But none of us know what is around the corner and you and the people you love - your close family and friends - matter more.

So, this brilliant job is currently being advertised with a closing date of the 8<sup>th</sup> of January. Please do promote amongst your links and networks and get people to get in touch with me if they want to know more [jane@ncls.co.uk](mailto:jane@ncls.co.uk)  
Link to the application details are here [www.ncls.co.uk/job-vacancies/](http://www.ncls.co.uk/job-vacancies/).

### Norfolk Community Law Service Chief Executive

Salary c. £55,000  
Permanent full time  
Executive post



#### Our Chief Executive is retiring at the end of April 2023. Could you be our next one?

NCLS is a charity that has been working across Norfolk to address unmet legal need for more than 40 years. We provide accredited free legal advice, specialist advice and representation across a range of services, including debt, discrimination, domestic abuse, employment, family, immigration, welfare benefits. All our services are delivered by teams of skilled professionals – employees and volunteers.

We have a track record of adapting to change and creating new services in response to identified need. Clients tell us our help is lifechanging. The cuts to legal aid, Covid 19 and the cost-of-living crisis means our services matter now more than ever.

We are looking for a highly motivated, people centered leader who is committed to equality and justice to help steer us through the uncertain times ahead.

#### We welcome applicants who

- have proven strategic and management skills, including in change management
- have experience of fundraising, commissioning and financial management
- understand the importance of partnership and collaboration across a range of sectors

**Deadline for receipt of applications:** Sunday 8th January 2023

**Interviews:** week commencing 23rd January

For further information and to download an application pack go to  
[www.ncls.co.uk/job-vacancies](http://www.ncls.co.uk/job-vacancies)

## A BIG THANK YOU!

To the Supporters of NCLS for all their work, to our volunteers and partners, and to our funders who include:

A B Charitable Trust  
Access to Justice Foundation  
Advice UK  
Allen and Overy Foundation  
Arnold Clark  
Aviva  
Broadland District Council  
Children's Society  
Citizens Advice Norfolk  
Cromer Town Council  
Good Things Foundation  
Henry Smith Foundation  
Home Office  
Hopstead  
Hut42  
Lady Hind Trust  
Leeway  
Legal Education Foundation  
Mancroft Advice Project  
Money and Pension Service  
Norfolk and Norwich Law Society  
Norfolk Community Foundation  
Norfolk County Council  
Norwich City Council  
Norwich Consolidated Charities  
One Norwich  
Paul Bassham Trust  
Peoples Postcode Lottery  
Police and Crime Commissioner  
Public Health England  
Septagon Charity  
Shaw Trust  
Snelling Charitable Trust  
The UEA  
Tudor Trust

## WE ARE A REGISTERED CHARITY PROVIDING A RANGE OF FREE, INDEPENDENT, CONFIDENTIAL LEGAL SERVICES:

### LEGAL ADVICE ON EMPLOYMENT, FAMILY AND GENERAL MATTERS

15 minutes legal advice with a solicitor

To book call 01603 496623 or email [info@ncls.co.uk](mailto:info@ncls.co.uk)

### DEBT ADVICE

For anyone who is worried about money that they owe.

To book call 01603 851246 or email [debt@ncls.co.uk](mailto:debt@ncls.co.uk)

### WELFARE BENEFITS ADVICE

Advice and representation for welfare benefit appeals.

To book call 01603 851248 or email [wrars@ncls.co.uk](mailto:wrars@ncls.co.uk)

### LEGAL ADVICE FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Telephone appointments with a solicitor on Wednesday mornings.

To book call 01603 496623 or email [info@ncls.co.uk](mailto:info@ncls.co.uk)

### IMMIGRATION ADVICE

Advice and help with Home Office applications.

Advice and representation for right to reside and welfare benefit appeals.

To book call 01603 851247 or email [immigration@ncls.co.uk](mailto:immigration@ncls.co.uk)

### FAMILY COURT SUPPORT SERVICE

Support for parents seeking child contact through the Courts.

To book call 01603 851249 or email [family@ncls.co.uk](mailto:family@ncls.co.uk)

### RENT ARREARS MEDIATION SERVICE

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



**NORFOLK  
COMMUNITY  
LAW  
SERVICE**

### Norfolk Community Law Service

14 Prince of Wales Road, Norwich, NR1 1LB

Phone: 01603 496623

E-mail: [info@ncls.co.uk](mailto:info@ncls.co.uk)

**Donations to support NCLS can be made via:**

<https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/17536#!/DonationDetails>

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