

Impact Report 2022/23



Changing lives - Asserting rights - Eliminating inequality



Thoughts from our CEO

2022/23 has been another challenging year. The legacy of Covid 19 means already established inequalities have become further entrenched. Inequalities worsened by the cost-of-living crisis, the Hostile Environment, and the lack of investment in access to justice.

We continue to try and influence the inevitable move towards a digitalised justice system. There is a place for remote court hearings, but they do not work for everyone. Social Welfare law is multi layered, and we work hard to help our digitally excluded clients access advice and representation and assert their rights.

We received 9,600 enquiries across all services and again had to close services temporarily during the year so we could catch up. Analysis of the work we do with clients shows the growing complexity of the issues they face. The number of 'interventions' recorded for each client has increased by 29% since 2020.

Change is our constant. A new Social Welfare solicitor role provides urgent specialist help with multiple and complex legal problems, meaning clients only tell their story once. Our Mobile Legal Adviser is embedded in community spaces such as Libraries and Social Supermarkets, brokering legal solutions for people in a place they choose. The Womens Debt Service is supporting women who face additional barriers and challenges.

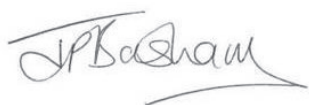
A new Family Service Manager is leading and developing our busy Family and Domestic Abuse service. Volunteering continues to be at the core of our work, and clients benefited from almost 10,000 volunteer hours this year. Our new Volunteer Coordinator role is improving the experience of volunteers and developing more opportunities moving forward.

We are a quality organisation, and once again passed the Advice Quality Mark Standard with several areas of best practice. Our Womens Debt Service was shortlisted by the Institute of Money Advisers (IMA) at their 2022 Innovation Awards. We were also proud to see our Volunteer and Advice Manager Judi Lincoln (who retired last year) receive the prestigious Norfolk and Norwich Law Society Award for her outstanding contribution to the legal community. So well deserved.

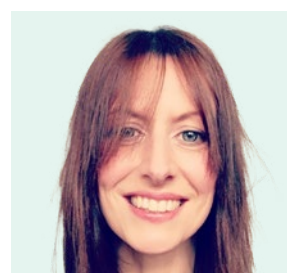
It is important that we celebrate the success of NCLS in this report, and the tangible positive impact our team of staff and volunteers have on the people of Norfolk every day. It is also important to recognise some of the key messages within it. These include higher levels of debt; increasing demand; financially poor clients with disabilities and/or ill health forced to attend court to fight for money that they are entitled to; and victims of domestic abuse reliant on legal advice from a charity to stay safe.

2022 saw the launch of the The Bar Council of England and Wales 'Access to Justice Dashboard'. Mark Fenhalls KC, chair of the Bar Council, called for Government to fund capacity across the justice system (that includes charities like NCLS) and widen access to legal aid.

Sadly, I do not see any positive changes on the horizon any time soon and there are more threats ahead. The Illegal Migration Bill and the British Bill of Rights are just two examples. So NCLS is here to stay because we must be. Increasingly the people of Norfolk depend on us.



Jane Basham
Chief Executive Officer



Sarah Clack
Director of Operations
and Development



Bev Marshall
Finance Manager



About NCLS

VISION

To satisfy unmet legal need, contributing to a just and fair society

MISSION

To empower the people of Norfolk to assert their legal rights, using education, advice and representation

We are a legal advice charity and have been working in Norfolk for over 40 years.

We run a range of free, accredited, independent specialist legal services to meet local need.

Our work enables people to challenge decisions that affect them. We help keep people in jobs; safe; in their homes; in this country; out of poverty and destitution.

While people from all walks of life access us, we target our services at people who have been made most vulnerable by society. This includes ex-offenders, people on low incomes, people with physical and or learning disabilities or mental health issues, people from minority ethnic communities. We had 9,600 enquiries in 2022/23 and helped just under 4,000 people in person and using technology.

Across Norfolk we currently provide:

- **weekly free legal advice 'clinics'** covering discrimination, domestic abuse, employment, family & general advice
- **mobile legal adviser service**
- **social welfare solicitor**
- **debt and money advice** including Debt Relief Orders and Insolvency Proceedings
- **welfare rights advice** and representation at appeals tribunals
- **legal advice** for victims of domestic abuse
- **immigration advice** up to Level 3
- **rent arrears mediation** for Norwich City Council housing tenants
- **family court support service** for cases concerning child contact

We employ **23 FTE staff** and have **151 volunteers**, including solicitors and law students. We have a robust system of governance with **10 trustees** who oversee all our activities. Our services are accredited by the Advice Quality Standard.



Team NCLS



NCAAN at Westminster

We helped **3,818** clients with **4,332** legal issues across Norfolk

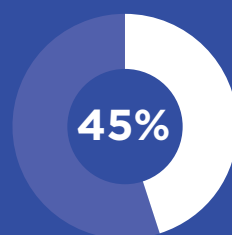
Total clients of all services

2022/23 **3,818** 2021/22 **3,269** **up 17%**

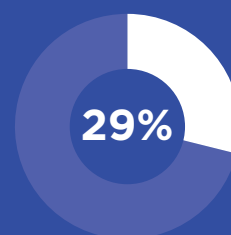
Of these, **3,031** were new clients, who we helped with **3,612** legal issues across Norfolk

Clients by Local Authority area

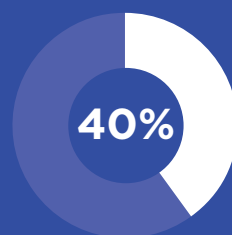
	2022/23	2021/22
Breckland	495	357
Broadland	431	324
Great Yarmouth	362	342
King's Lynn & West Norfolk	289	265
North Norfolk	308	352
Norwich	1424	1193
South Norfolk	324	331
Other	185	216
Total	3818	3269



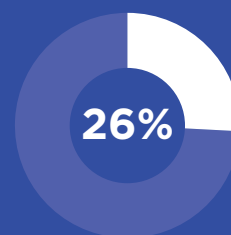
of all our clients have dependent children,
28% of all clients are single parents



of our clients are from minority ethnic communities



of our clients have a disability and/or long term health condition



of our clients have mental ill health

Number of legal issues

	Free Legal Advice	Debt	Discrimination	Domestic Abuse	Family Court Support	Immigration	Mobile Legal Adviser	Rent Mediation	Welfare Rights	Other	Total
2022/23	1856	599	12	167	467	558	313	31	326	3	4332
2021/22	1913	472	13	108	433	590	189	24	183	7	3932
2020/21	2211	258	16	116	197	297	0	8	112	29	3244

Total clients across all services*

	Free Legal Advice	Debt	Discrimination	Domestic Abuse	Family Court Support	Immigration	Mobile Legal Adviser	Rent Mediation	Welfare Rights	Other	Total
2022/23	1630	590	12	163	464	497	246	30	303	3	3976
2021/22	1644	472	13	106	433	544	138	24	171	7	3552
2020/21	1994	257	16	108	185	285	0	8	109	29	2991

*some clients were helped by more than one service so may be included multiple times.

Welfare Rights

£2.3m

of welfare benefits were awarded and paid back to clients

77% success rate at appeal tribunal – 15% higher than the national avg.

not confident in using internet

35%

45% live in social housing

live in private rented accommodation

15%

64% are unfit for work

are carers

9%

Welfare Rights client quote

“ NCLS were a godsend at a very dark time with my benefits going wrong and PIP ending during Covid leaving me in a terrible state. Thank you. ”

Represented clients at

155

Tribunal hearings

an increase of 58% on 2021/22

This service has secured more than

£12m

for clients since it began in 2013

Simon

Simon was referred to NCLS for advice about his options following a tribunal hearing that went ahead and was refused in his absence. He had requested a phone hearing but could not face taking the hearing call on the day because of his anxiety.

He had not had any advice during the appeals process and did not realise how important it was to ask for, and attend, an oral hearing of his appeal. Simon had claimed Personal Independence Payment (PIP) since 2020 having struggled for a long time with arthritis, PTSD, depression and anxiety. He lived alone in social housing, supported by his father.

We helped Simon through the process of requesting the statement of reasons for the tribunal's decision, and requesting permission to appeal based on a potential error of law. This application was granted and a new hearing took place in September 2022, again by phone, and the appeal was allowed with an award of the standard rate for both the daily living and mobility components of PIP. Simon was awarded PIP back to the date of his original claim. We supported Simon through the whole process, represented at the hearing itself and provided a written submission to the tribunal outlining his case.

The award was just under £18,000. It will really help Simon to cover the costs he incurs living with a long-term disability. This is vitally important at a time when households are increasingly struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.

Debt

Clients
presented
with

£3m of Debt

Up from **£1.9 million** in 2021/22

152% increase in the value of Debt written off/renegotiated from 2021/22

not confident in
using internet

17%

52%

live in social housing

live in prison

8%

20%

live in private rented
accommodation

Utility debt
for women is

112%

higher
than for
men

Debt client quote

“ I would like to thank my adviser for an amazing hard work, help and support to me, dealing with my issues. I couldn't imagine what happened to me without any of her help. So many thanks again. **”**

Increase in average Debt for our clients:

2019-20 **£4,429**

2020-21 **£4,103**

2021-22 **£7,277**

2022-23 **£15,550**

Average Debt of clients up **113%** from previous year

Chris

Chris was signposted to us by local domestic abuse charity, Leeway. Chris and her baby daughter were living in a refuge following domestic abuse from her partner. She was not undertaking paid work because she was looking after her young child.

She was in receipt of Universal Credit and Child Benefit, as well as ad hoc Child Maintenance from her daughter's father. She had debts totalling £12,500, made up of a Universal Credit advance (which was being deducted from her benefit payments), rent arrears, council tax arrears, utility arrears, National Insurance contribution arrears, a mobile phone contract, credit cards and payment plans. She had been receiving multiple letters and phone calls from her creditors and had sought help from the Wellbeing Service for her mental health. Our female debt adviser completed a Financial Statement at a telephone appointment with the client, timed to coincide with her child's nap. This showed that she was in a deficit budget, with no money left over to pay creditors after she had covered her essential outgoings. She had no assets or savings, and was about to be evicted from the property she rented with her ex-partner.

We helped Chris check she was receiving all benefits that she was entitled to, and wrote to the most persistent of her creditors, asking them to give her space as she re-organised her finances. We supported Chris over the summer, through the process of successfully securing social housing, and after 6 months she was finally able to move from the refuge. We helped find grants to cover flooring in her new property and provided a one-off supermarket voucher to help her stock up on food.

Chris's circumstances had changed considerably, so we completed a new Financial Statement which showed that she has a surplus of £5 per month from which to pay her debts. Chris hopes to get on top of her finances and to become financially stable. We are keeping in touch as she considers her next steps.

Immigration

11%

not confident in
using internet

no access to internet

8%

37%

live in private rented
accommodation

EUSS clients with
complex cases

131

13%

of applications to
Home Office related
to domestic abuse and
prevented destitution

of clients had used
us before

24%

15%

of clients heard of us
via family and friends

Immigration client quote



Very, very happy.
Exceeded
expectations. Extremely
helpful, empathetic,
lovely people.



Mhari

Mhari had come to the UK with a visa requiring her to work or seek work in the UK. She worked for several years and became unwell before she had spent enough time in the UK to qualify to settle here. Her complex medical conditions meant that she was no longer able to work, and she became destitute, relying on her family for accommodation and food.

Her visa conditions did not allow her to apply for benefits or housing and there was no ability to ask for this restriction to be lifted. We submitted a human rights application to the Home Office to change her permission to stay since she was unable to meet the conditions of her current permission. We also asked for her to be granted access to benefits and housing with any permission. As part of this application we helped her gather medical evidence and statements from her family members. We provided a detailed submission to the Home Office on the reasons why we believed that she should be granted permission to live in the UK.

After several months Mhari was granted permission to stay in the UK with access to benefits and housing. This has meant that Mhari has been able to continue with her medical treatment in the UK and considerable stress on Mhari and her family members has been removed. Mhari will become eligible for settlement in the UK within the next two years and we look forward to helping her through this next stage.

Mobile Legal Adviser

63% of clients are women

live outside
Norwich

80%

14% not confident in
using internet

of clients had
between 2 - 4
complex legal issues

20%

Visits

24

outreach locations
across Norfolk

Mobile Legal Adviser client quote

“ Thank you again I would have been lost in my darkest times if it hadn't been for you. ”

Olena

Olena approached our Mobile Legal Adviser (MLA) at an outreach session that offered specialised support for people arriving in the local area under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Unfortunately, the relationship with her sponsor had broken down, so with the assistance of the local authority, she and her children were successfully rehoused.

However Olena required advice regarding her Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) which had been sent to the original sponsor's address, and which she was unable to retrieve. Olena was clearly exhausted from having to relay her story multiple times to various agencies, and as a Ukrainian / Russian translator was required each time, this understandably contributed to her frustrations.

Our MLA introduced Olena to NCLS Immigration service, fully explaining the situation. Their Russian-speaking adviser arranged an in-person appointment with a focus on discussing solutions. The adviser then liaised with the Homes For Ukraine scheme on her behalf, assisted Olena with making a replacement BRP application, and arranged biometric appointments. Olena was updated regularly on the progress of the application, and a replacement was successfully received by her. It had a big and positive impact on Olena during what was and still is, a very anxious and traumatic time. Olena was relieved to have the freedom to leave the UK to return to the Ukraine if safe to do so.

Free Legal Advice Clinics (FLAC)

12%

not confident in
using internet

are women

62%

25%

live in social
housing

live in private rented
accommodation

24%

Free Legal Advice Clinics client quote

“Your service is some peace of mind for people like myself on low income. We are very lucky to have access to such a service. All the staff were very helpful and professional.”

FLAC Solicitor quote



Joanna Longe,
Longe & Co



I believe I may be one of the longest serving solicitors on NCLS advice rota. The service is an invaluable resource for the people of Norfolk. Not only can clients obtain legal advice but they are able to access support in preparing court applications, writing statements and how to conduct themselves in proceedings. I chose to become involved many years ago to help people who were vulnerable, victims of abuse or because they struggled to access legal advice through more conventional routes. I am proud to be part of this exceptional service.



Dean

Dean first approached Shelter who were unable to assist him because his home was not at immediate risk so he contacted NCLS and was given a FLAC appointment. Dean has significant physical and mental health problems and receives PIP. He lives in sheltered accommodation and his relationship with his social landlord had soured during Covid as all visits by cleaners and the scheme manager had stopped. Dean saw himself as the spokesperson for the residents who felt abandoned.

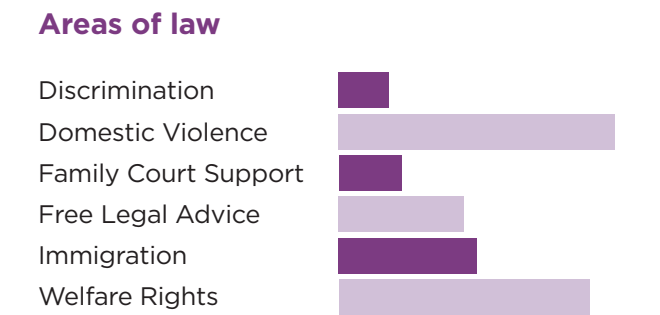
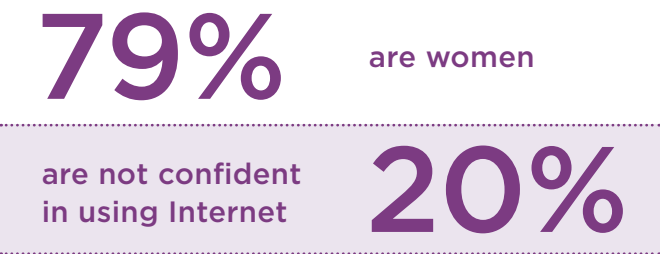
Because of his 'outspoken' approach, his social landlord sought an injunction against him under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. The FLAC solicitor identified that although intelligent and articulate Dean would be unable to effectively represent himself because he was too emotionally involved, and offered to take on the case on a pro bono basis.

The judge strongly encouraged an immediate attempt to settle, and the FLAC solicitor worked with the landlord's representative to achieve a mutually acceptable 'consent order'. Dean gave undertakings as to future conduct, which he felt confident of keeping while they addressed the landlord's concerns.

Had Dean received an injunction it would have placed him at real risk of losing his home. The negotiated settlement also meant Dean avoided the stress and anxiety of months of litigation and escaped having to pay any legal costs. He was understandably very relieved and appreciative of the result.

Social Welfare Solicitor

A new role designed to provide clients with Justice In One Place. Working with people who have complex and multiple legal problems so they only have to tell their story once.



Social Welfare Solicitor client quote

“ Thank you for all your help during an emotional and tough time. ”

Candace

Candace was applying for a non-molestation order and attended NCLS with a specialist Domestic Abuse support worker only a few days before the court hearing. The Social Welfare solicitor (SWS) was told that Candace needed help in drafting a statement, but quickly identified that Candace also needed to supply a bundle of evidence to support her statement.

The SWS assisted Candace to draft her original statement to the standards that are required by the court and prepared the bundle for Candace, with specific reference to the evidence. This work needed to be done by the next day so that Candace could apply to court for the documents to be served to the other side.

Candace was extremely stressed and unable to obtain legal aid due to her income, yet unable to afford to pay. She'd previously attended court unrepresented, and this experience had left her feeling reluctant to return to court to pursue the non-molestation order. This would have left her feeling unsafe.

Without the encouragement of the specialist Domestic Abuse worker and the assistance given by NCLS, she would not have continued with the order. Our SWS referred Candace to our Family Court Support service who continue to support her.

Family/Domestic Abuse (DA)

Supported
clients at

174

Family Court
hearings

96%

of DA clients are
women

of Family Court Support
service clients are men

25%

61%

of all Family/DA clients
have dependent children

and **48%** of all clients are single
with dependent children

54%

increase in the number
of Domestic Abuse
clients from 2021/22

Family Court Support client quote

“

Just fantastic
people delivering
a service very well and
helping in doing
so. Thank you.

”

Beatriz

Beatriz was referred to NCLS in February 2022 by a support worker from her child's school, following some safeguarding concerns about her son being in the care of his father, particularly around the father's use of drugs. A court order was already in place but having heard the client's concerns, our solicitor advised Beatriz to return the matter to court to vary the order.

We assisted Beatriz to complete the court application form and to apply for fee remission as she was on a low income. Beatriz attended two hearings with her support worker as her McKenzie Friend, and received legal advice from NCLS prior to each occasion.

NCLS assisted Beatriz to draft her statement in preparation for the final hearing, and to request a separate waiting area, as she found the father's presence intimidating and had experienced a panic attack at the previous hearing. Beatriz requested a McKenzie Friend from NCLS for the final hearing; an experienced volunteer accompanied Beatriz, and an order was made promoting contact between father and son, but with some important safeguards in place to ensure the child's welfare.

Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN)

NCLS is the lead agency for Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN), a collaboration of independent accredited specialist social welfare advice agencies that includes Age UK Norfolk; Age UK Norwich; The Bridge Plus; Citizens Advice Norfolk; Citizens Advice Diss and Thetford; Equal Lives; Mancroft Advice Project; and Shelter.

The network includes an on-line referral system designed by the advice sector, to ensure an efficient 'no wrong door' for clients in need of advice and representation.

The NCAN Referral System currently includes:

116 VCSE services and **93** Statutory Sector teams. There are **1,300** active users of the system.

2021/22 **6,015** 2022/23 **9,007**

Total NCAN referrals up 49%

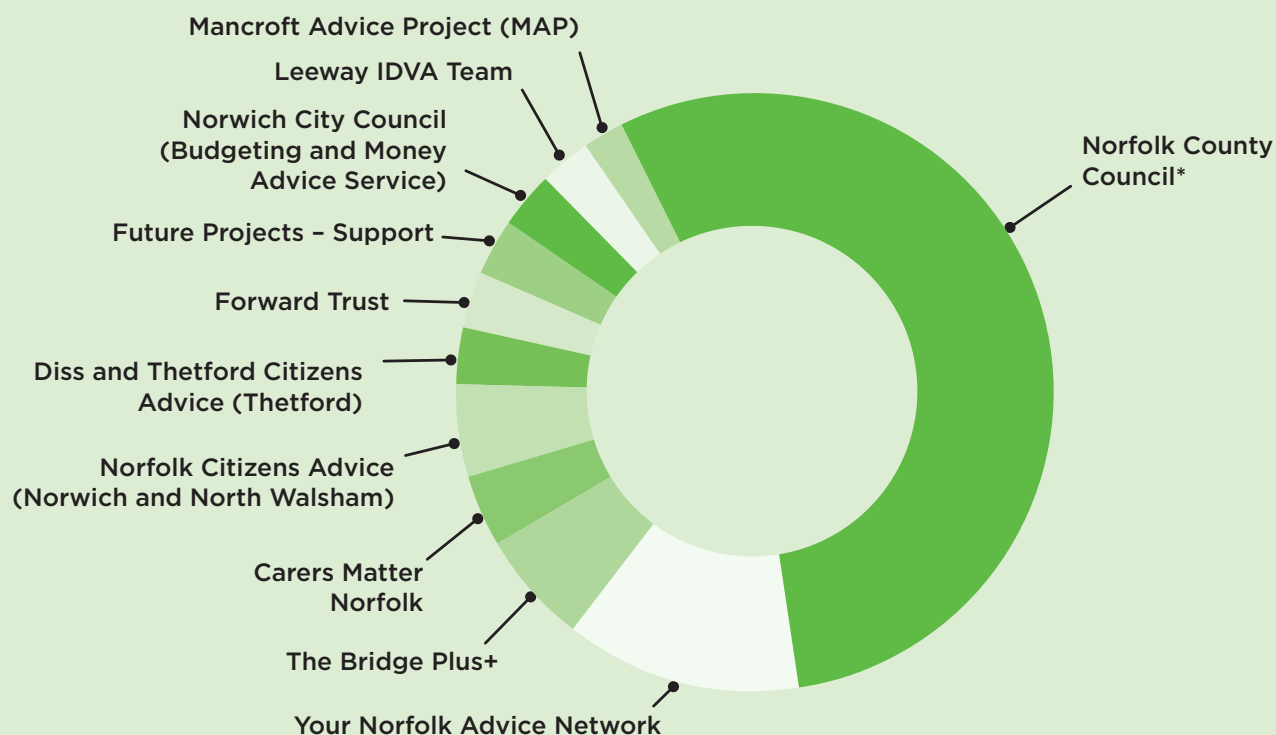
NCAN referrals to NCLS

2021/22 **654**

2022/23 **909 up 38%**

20% of all new NCLS clients came via the referral system

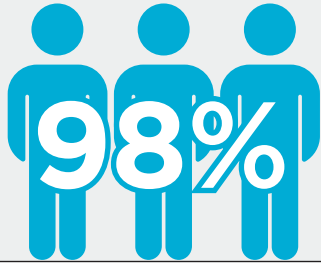
Top referrals from NCAN to NCLS



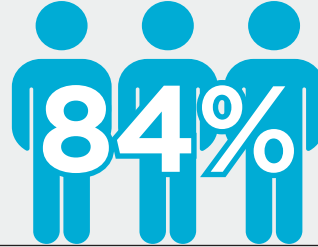
*Norfolk County Council teams include Norfolk Assistance Scheme (NAS), Money Support, Welfare Rights service and People from Abroad Team.

What our clients say

How many clients would be 'very likely' to recommend us to a friend?



Family Domestic Abuse (DA) clients
Debt clients
Immigration and Welfare Rights clients



FLA Clinic clients

Client feedback questionnaires

of our clients believe things **would not** have got better without our advice

90%

of our clients found the service **'very friendly'**

96%

of our clients found that the information and advice given was **'very clear'**

94%

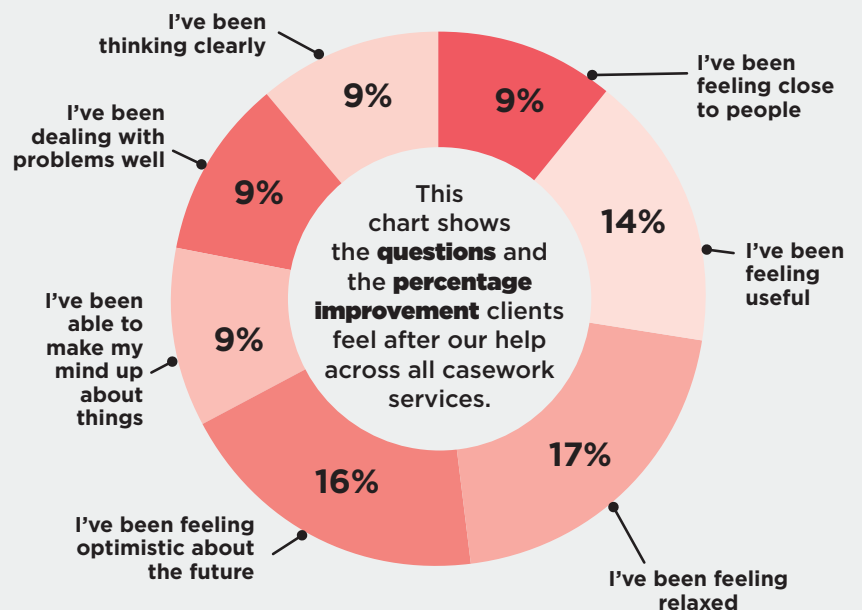
of our clients were **'very happy'** with the service they received

93%

Health & Wellbeing outcomes

We use the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scales.

These were developed to enable the measurement of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing.



A snapshot per service

Debt

I've been feeling relaxed
14% improvement

Family Court Support

I've been feeling optimistic about the future
19% improvement

Immigration

I've been feeling useful
15% improvement

Welfare Rights

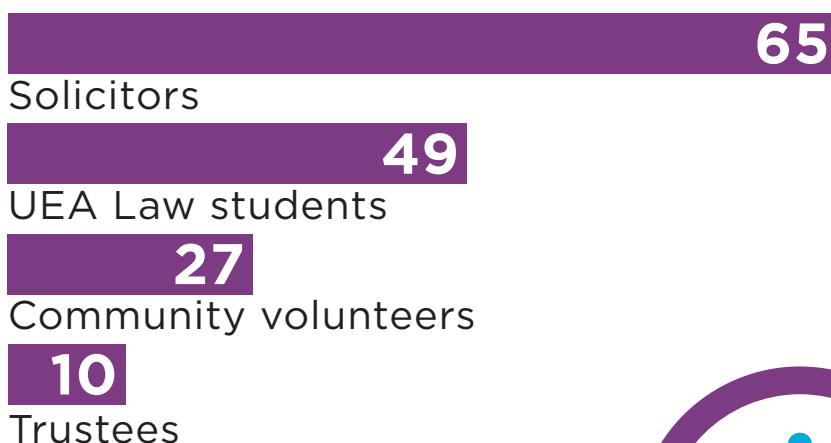
I've been feeling optimistic about the future
22% improvement

Volunteers – changing lives - building skills



151

volunteers



Total 9,995 volunteer hours

Student volunteer quote



“It’s been a great opportunity to volunteer at NCLS. It has really pushed me outside of my comfort zone and allowed me to develop new skills. I have had the opportunity to work with solicitors and listen to them giving advice to clients. The experience has been invaluable when applying for training contracts and building my professional network.”

Kellen Webber, Legal Services volunteer



[cont... >](#)

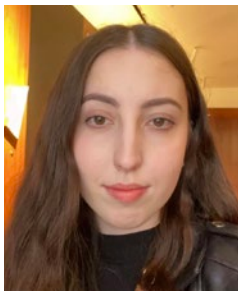
Volunteers (cont.)

8,704 UEA student/
Community volunteer
hours - **value £140,000***

*based on a value of £16.09 calculated by the National Social Value Measurement Framework (TOMs)

1,291 free legal hours
provided by solicitors -
value £206,000

Student volunteer quote



“Volunteering
at Norfolk
Community Law

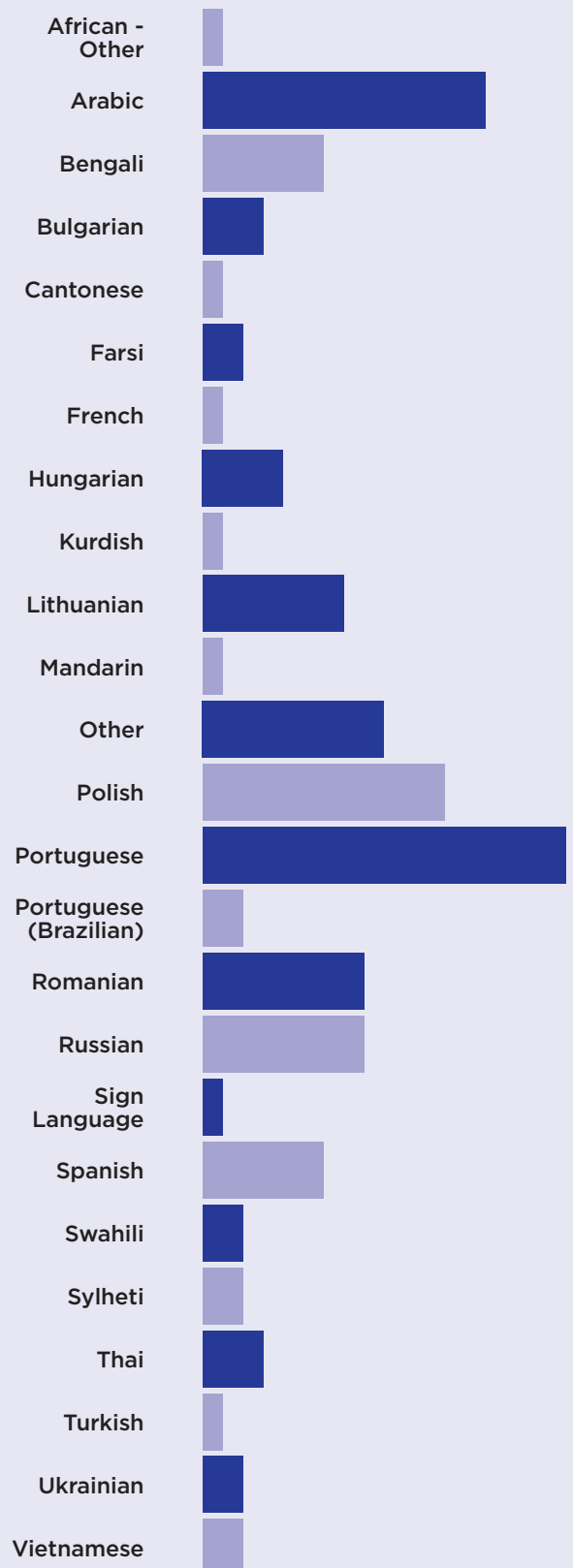
Service has been one of
the best decisions I've
made while studying at
UEA. Working within the
Legal Services team has

given me the opportunity to develop my
communication skills and confidence, interact
with real clients and get a sense of what tasks
solicitors are expected to fulfil. The team has
been so supportive, always encouraging me
to take on challenges that will
expand my legal skills.

**Orjona Gelaj, Legal Services
Volunteer**

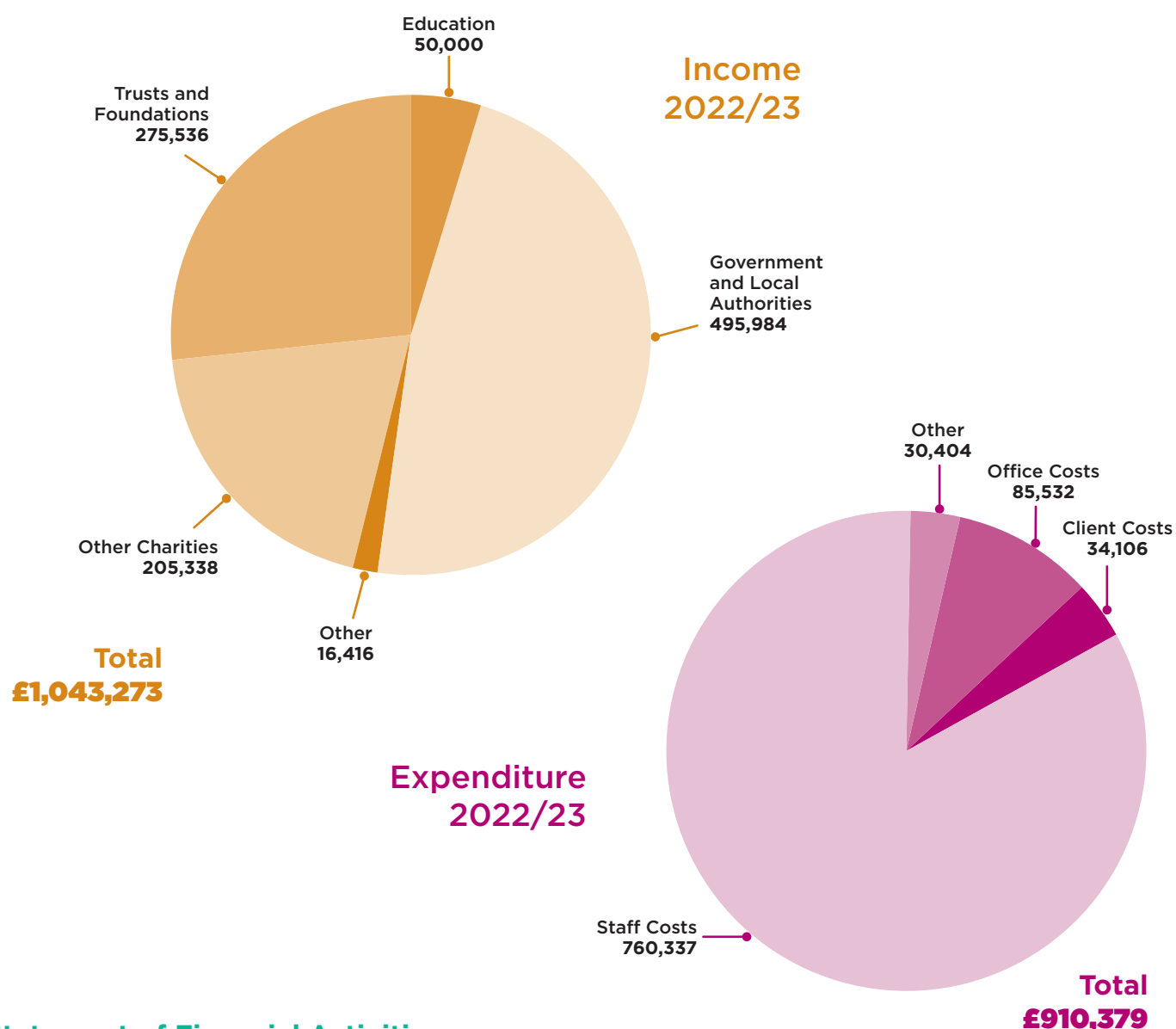
Total estimated social
value of volunteers -
£346,000

Languages spoken by clients[†]



[†] for whom English is not their first language

Financial Highlights



Statement of Financial Activities

INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM	Unrestricted	Restricted	31/03/2023 Total	31/03/2022 Total
Donations and legacies	123,386	917,806	1,041,193	889,857
Charitable activities	294	0	294	48
Investment income	1,786	0	1,786	68
	125,466	917,806	1,043,273	889,973
EXPENDITURE ON				
Raising funds	16,001	2,500	18,501	13,215
Charitable activities	33,985	857,894	891,878	823,366
	49,985	860,394	910,379	836,581
NET INCOME / (EXPENDITURE)	75,481	57,412	132,894	53,392
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS				
Reserves brought forward	197,448	155,661	353,109	299,717
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD	272,929	213,074	486,003	353,109

All figures are subject to audit. *£140,570 of restricted funding is for NCAN use only.

Thank you from Sarah Blunden, Chair



I am pleased to be able to sign off the 2022/23 NCLS Impact report after what has been another very challenging year. Despite the many difficulties, NCLS has emerged in a strong position and has been able to assist more people than ever before.

My sincere thanks go to our dedicated staff who always work with great skill and devotion to enable our clients to access justice. NCLS is a well governed organisation and I would like to thank my brilliant team of Board colleagues who devote so much of their time, energy and expertise to the work that we do.

NCLS is very grateful to have so many partners who continue to give us constant support. These include the UEA Law School and our team of fantastic UEA law students who volunteer with us in so many different roles, whilst also continuing with their degrees. We would also like to thank the Norfolk and Norwich Law Society, the Norfolk Junior Lawyers Division, our team of supporters, as well as the many local law firms and solicitors who deliver our busy Free Legal Advice clinics. We are also very grateful to our Community Volunteers who give so generously of their time and expertise, and of course all our funders.

Finally, I would like to thank our CEO Jane Basham who retired in May 2023. NCLS has changed for the better in so many ways under her leadership - steering us through the pandemic, developing new agile ways of working, identifying new funding streams and using her platform to speak out about inequality and injustice. NCLS has grown by 75% since her appointment in 2019. Her contribution to the stability of NCLS has been immense and we wish her a very happy and fulfilling retirement. Her replacement, David Powles, has now taken up the role and we are delighted to have him on board. At a time of political uncertainty and economic turbulence the demand for our services is greater than ever. Successful fundraising has become even more challenging but despite this we move forward with strength.

We know that empowering the people of Norfolk to assert their legal rights contributes to a just and fair society and we will continue to strive to plug the gap of unmet legal need.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Sarah Blunden".

Sarah Blunden, Chair

Hello from David Powles – new Chief Exec.

It is a real honour to take over as the Chief Executive of Norfolk Community Law Service, a charity that does so much important legal work for thousands of people who would otherwise have little or no such support. I am incredibly excited to take on this role and to identify ways we can extend our support to those we currently assist and ensure we find ways to help even more of those people who need it.



Acknowledgements and thanks:



Norfolk law firms that help NCLS support clients in need

Ashtons Legal	David Milton	Howard Pollock & Webb	Nicholsons Solicitors	UEA Law Clinic
BBL Family Law	Ellisons Solicitors			Valemus Law
Birketts	Family Law Consultancy	Howes Percival	Owen Warnock	Ward Gethin Archer
Chamberlins	FM Family Law	Kenneth Bush	Ronaldsons	Working Law Solicitors
Clapham & Collinge	Fosters	Leathes Prior	Rudlings Wakelam	
Cozens Hardy	Hansells	Lighthouse Mediation	Scott Moncrieff & Associates	
Dawsons Law	Hatch Brenner	Leigh Day	Simper Law	
David Laws Solicitors	Haywards	Longe & Co	Spire	
		Mills & Reeve	Story & Robinsons	

Get in touch with us

01603 496623

Immigration Advice	Option 1	immigration@ncls.co.uk
Debt Advice	Option 2	debt@ncls.co.uk
Domestic Abuse	Option 3	family@ncls.co.uk
Family	Option 3	family@ncls.co.uk
Welfare Benefits Advice	Option 4	wrars@ncls.co.uk
Free Legal Advice	Option 5	info@ncls.co.uk

(Free Legal Advice for Discrimination, Employment and General advice)



Changing lives - Asserting rights - Eliminating inequality

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