

# TOWER HAMLETS LAW CENTRE

## OPENING HOURS

<b>MONDAY</b>	<b>10am-1pm</b>	<b>2pm-4pm</b>
<b>TUESDAY</b>	<b>10am-1pm</b>	<b>CLOSED</b>
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	<b>10am-1pm</b>	<b>2pm-4pm</b>
<b>THURSDAY</b>	<b>10am-1pm</b>	<b>2pm-4pm</b>
<b>FRIDAY</b>	<b>10am-1pm</b>	<b>2pm-4pm</b>

Telephone 020 7247 8998

The Law Centre also hold general drop-in sessions for one-off advice on Monday evenings from 6.30pm. Other community advice organisations working in the borough can contact the Law Centre for second tier advice in our specialist areas of law, or to find out more about training courses available.

Contact us in the following ways:

TOWER HAMLETS LAW CENTRE  
214 WHITECHAPEL ROAD  
LONDON  
E1 1BJ

DX: 155240 TOWER HAMLETS 2

TEL: 020 7247 8998

FAX: 020 7247 9424

EMAIL: [info@thlc.co.uk](mailto:info@thlc.co.uk)

WEB: [www.thlc.co.uk](http://www.thlc.co.uk)



A company limited by guarantee, registered in England no. 1720518.

Registered charity no. 287282. VAT no. 244 4252 79

Law Centre © is the registered trade mark of the Law Centres Federation

The Law Centre's work is supported by among others



Community Legal Service



Supported by The National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund



# Annual Review 2009

## What's on the horizon for community legal advice services?





Tower Hamlets Law Centre


# CONTENTS


Chair's report . . . . . 3


## Specialist advice services

 Housing . . . . . 4


 Welfare Benefits . . . . . 6


 Immigration . . . . . 8


 Education . . . . . 10

 Employment & Discrimination . . . . . 12


## Reception, referral, networking and community work

 Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network . . . . . 14


 Reception and referral services . . . . . 16


 Stats and facts . . . . . 17


## Financial review

 Financial report and balance sheet . . . . . 18

## Thanks & Acknowledgements

 Management Committee . . . . . 20

 Probono assistance and volunteers . . . . . 21

 Our staff . . . . . 22

# CHAIR'S REPORT

I am delighted to once again invite you to consider the annual review for Tower Hamlets Law Centre for the period 2008-9. The Law Centre has been providing free legal advice since 1969 and I have been involved since 1973. But 2009 is one of the most difficult years for us.

We have seen many Law Centres across the UK close as statutory authorities are unable to sustain existing funding levels for the provision of free legal help and contracts are awarded to private companies.

These are worrying times for us but we are determined that the needs of our clients in one of the poorest and most diverse areas of the United Kingdom will continue to be our priority as we consider how best to provide services into the future.

We must therefore thank all of our skilled staff and dedicated volunteers who despite the difficulties and challenges that we face continue to provide vital services to people seeking specialist legal advice and who continue to strive and innovate to ensure the survival of the centre and its services.

We have new and exciting projects that have started recently: the Bengali mother's advice service (funded by London Borough of Tower Hamlets), a London-wide education advice and services specifically for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents (funded by London Councils). We received funding from the Legal Services Commission to offer a solicitor's training contract and from Future 500 for a 6 month training placement for two young people to gain office experience. Additionally resources were found to assist children and young people facing difficulties with their education because of exclusion or special needs (funded by London Councils) and we are partners in a number of other exciting initiatives. This development work has been supported by the Big Lottery and the London Legal Support Trust.

We continue to seek new members of our management committee and are particularly keen to invite people who can give us the perspective of the different groups of people that we aim to help, such as young people, people with disabilities and people from minority communities, to join the board. We also seek members with particular skills that will assist the expansion of the business of the law centre. If you are interested please get in touch with Sue Brown, the Centre Manager (email s.brown@thlc.co.uk or telephone 020 7375 7135).

A big thank you to all our funders and those that kindly makes donations both in terms of financial support and the gift of time and resources to support the work of the centre.

Last but not least I thank my fellow trustees who have given their time on a voluntary basis to take legal responsibility for the overall strategy that will take us forward into another year.

The annual review can be made available in alternative formats on request. Our contact details are on the back page of this review.



## HOUSING

The housing group has seen a great deal of change in the year, with Nicola Dean returning from maternity leave shortly before Baljit Dod, Maria Mitchell and Sherina Kabir went onto maternity leave. We were able to recruit locums for all posts, and welcomed Shazina Hussain, Kathy Meade and Denise Phillips in this capacity. We have also had support from a casework assistant, Ugo Hayter, at times. Lou Crisfield has been our one constant member of staff at all times. Despite the changes, we remain a strong team, and have continued to undertake high level casework, across a broad range of issues.

### Homelessness and community care

Assisting homeless clients accounts for the largest proportion of our casework, partly because of our specific work with homeless young people across East London under London Council's funding. We have developed our expertise in working with this specific group, and frequently advise and assist our clients in getting accommodation and support from social services, rather than homeless services, where this is more appropriate.

### Possession

Another major area of work continues to be defending those who are threatened with a possession order or eviction. This work has increased as a result of the financial difficulties many people find themselves in due to recession. We mainly advise and assist people against whom possession proceedings have already been started, including those who are facing immediate eviction, but increasingly work with clients at an earlier stage to try to avoid court action being taken.

We also continue to organise and advise on the possession duty scheme at Bow County Court, helping tenants who would otherwise be un-represented in front of the Judge. The scheme has a very high success rate in preventing these vulnerable clients from being evicted. In August we expanded the scheme, at the request of the court, to include advising the large number of borrowers facing possession claims by their mortgage lenders.

### Transfers and allocations

We also advise people on their position on the waiting list for social housing or for a transfer, and have set up dedicated advice session for people needing advice in this area. Our most notable success this year has been successfully challenging the lawfulness of Tower Hamlets' Lettings Policy by judicial review. We argued on behalf of our client, a single homeless man, that he was entitled to priority for rehousing due to his homelessness, despite not being in priority need. The court accepted that he was entitled to priority, and he was offered permanent accommodation within a few weeks. The council have now amended their policy to try to prevent other people taking advantage of this ruling, and we are now working towards challenging the new policy.

### Disrepair

We continue to advise a significant number of clients living in homes with disrepair, working to get them compensation for the conditions they have had to put up with, as well as getting the necessary repair works carried out.

### Other work

The group provides annual training to other voluntary sector agencies on specific housing law topics, namely homelessness, disrepair and lettings. These courses

4

are designed to help improve the quality of housing advice across the borough and continue to be well-attended. We have also provided training to young people's advisers in the East London boroughs covered by our youth homelessness project on the specific issues relating to young people, to help them advise their clients more effectively. We also provide regular training to our trainee volunteers who assist at the evening advice sessions.

The housing group holds evening advice sessions once or twice a month on Mondays, to help reach those who cannot access our services during office hours. These are supervised by the group, with assistance from volunteer trainees from Freshfields and Norton Rose. These sessions are very busy, and we usually have to restrict numbers due to limited capacity. We are able to help most people coming to the session with one-off legal advice but can also book clients in for normal casework sessions or refer on as appropriate.

## Case Studies



### Possession

We first saw Mrs D at an outreach session as part of our youth homelessness project. Mrs D and her family, including 4 children, faced possession proceedings brought by their private landlord because of rent arrears. The arrears were mainly due to housing benefit problems which came about when her husband's self employed work as a builder began to dry up. We were able to get the possession proceedings adjourned at short notice, get housing benefit reinstated and backdated, and then negotiate the withdrawal of the possession proceedings. As a result of our work, Mrs D and her family kept their home.



### Homelessness

An 18 year old young man who was having difficulties coping with managing his tenancy in his temporary accommodation was referred to us by an East London connexions service. He was facing eviction for rent arrears and the council were threatening to end their duties to him under the homeless legislation. We obtained his housing and social services files which revealed that he had first approached the council for help when he was 16. The duties that he would have been owed under the Children Act had clearly not been complied with. We argued that had the young man been assisted properly when he was 16 e.g. had been allocated a personal adviser, and been financially supported and accommodated by social services he would not have got into rent arrears and would not be facing eviction. We asked the council to retrospectively honour their duties to the young man. We took the case to judicial review and obtained an injunction preventing eviction. Eventually we obtained a settlement agreement in which the council agreed not to evict, to write off the rent arrears, appoint a personal adviser and put our client forward for an allocation of a permanent home under the council's care leavers scheme.



### Transfers and allocations

Mrs B came to see us when she needed help getting an urgent transfer. She lived in a studio flat, which was too small after her grand-daughter came to live with her following family problems. The situation became more urgent after her grand-daughter was sexually abused by a local resident and threatened repeatedly by the perpetrator's family. The council initially only gave limited additional priority for a move, but after our representations, Mrs B was given the highest possible priority for a move to a 2 bedroom property.

5

## £ WELFARE BENEFITS

We are Chris Parsons, Shahnaz Sikondari, Prabhjit Soomal and Amina Ali. This year has seen the Benefits Team continue to achieve some great results for our clients in terms of the financial outcomes from our casework. Hundreds of people who had been refused benefits through administrative errors, or through misunderstanding of the law by the staff at social security offices, have now been awarded benefit after our intervention. Hundreds more have had their rate of benefit increased. We have represented clients at over 150 appeal tribunals in the last twelve months.

One of the more common problems raised by clients this year has been Tax Credit overpayments, and we have been able to persuade the Tax Credit Office that in most cases these overpayments were not the fault of the claimant and so should not have to be paid back. This year also marked the transfer of the 'local' benefits processing office for a large part of the borough from Hackney to an office in Lancashire, and we did a lot of work helping clients whose benefits payments were interrupted as a consequence.

We are still working closely with the social services department of the Council to give advice to disabled and long-term ill people about their benefits, and we are continuing to offer advice in Somali and Bengali for those who are not fluent in English. We meet regularly with managers at the housing benefit and Jobcentre Plus offices to bring issues of concern to their attention. And our free training courses for staff at voluntary sector advice agencies in the borough have been more popular than ever.

During the last twelve months there has been an increase in the number of cases referred to us by other organisations for 'specialist level' casework. The increase probably reflects the increasingly difficult funding climate for advice agencies following Government reforms last year. Some agencies cannot afford the time needed to work on a complex case or to prepare a case for a tribunal so they pass the case to us. As an alternative to making a referral, we also offer local organisations free 'second tier' telephone support, allowing their staff to get advice from our Benefits Team which they can pass on to their clients.

6

## Case Studies

### Appeal victory

We advised a 77 year old Afro-Caribbean widow who had applied for Attendance Allowance for the first time and had been refused. She had experienced a sudden deterioration in her health, which had resulted in her daughter having to help her every day. She suffered with osteoarthritis in both knees, rheumatoid arthritis in her arms and hands resulting in tremors, glaucoma and a hearing impairment.

We made a late appeal against the decision and represented her at a tribunal. The tribunal accepted our arguments and she won the appeal. She received an arrears payment of £1,800 and a further £2,300 a year in ongoing benefit for the next three years. The outcome made a huge difference to her quality of life.

### Pension reinstated to 'dead' man

An 83 year old Somali man resident in the UK stopped receiving his Retirement Pension because he had become very ill whilst in Somalia, and was not able to return to the UK for a long time. The Pensions Service were wrongly informed that the gentleman had died while he was in Somalia and so they stopped his Retirement Pension.

On returning to the UK he sought our advice. We were able to persuade the Pensions Service that our client was owed arrears for all the time he had been abroad. He received £9,986 in Retirement Pension arrears and also received new weekly entitlements to Attendance Allowance and Pension Credit.

### Pension Credit success for misadvised pensioner

A Bangladeshi pensioner was granted discretionary leave to remain in the UK for 3 years and her daughter sought advice as to whether her mother could claim any benefit. The advice agency she spoke to told her that she couldn't. However we advised her that because her mother had been granted discretionary leave for 3 years, which would be extended for a further 3 years, and that after 6 years of discretionary leave she could apply for indefinite leave, she was therefore entitled to claim Pension Credit. Since she already had a delay of one year due to the misadvice she had received, we argued with the Pensions Service for backdating, and assisted her with the claim by arranging a visit to expedite her claim. Mrs B was awarded £119 per week from the date of her claim and arrears of Pension Credit amounting to £6,135.

### Tax Credit Office writes off overpayment after Law Centre complaint

A young British couple on low wages were surprised to suddenly be presented with a demand from the Tax Credit Office that they repay over £10,000 in tax credit which they had received three years ago. The Tax Credit Office argued that they had failed to inform them about a change in their circumstances at the time. In fact they had written by recorded delivery to the Tax Credit Office to tell them, and still had the recorded delivery receipt, but because it was now three years ago it was no longer possible to get proof from the Royal Mail that their letter had been delivered safely. We helped the couple to dispute the overpayment with the Tax Credit Office, and when that dispute was unsuccessful we complained to the HM Revenue & Customs Adjudicator arguing that the Tax Credit Office had been unreasonable in refusing to accept the possibility of error by themselves. The Adjudicator investigated and upheld the complaint, so the overpayment was 'written off' and did not have to be repaid.

7

## IMMIGRATION

The past year has seen many changes in the area of Immigration law, which will affect migration into the UK for our client group, as well as changes in the way our work has been funded by the Legal Services Commission and the members of staff within the Immigration Team. Baljit Dod started her maternity leave in March 2009 with Habib Rahman taking over her responsibilities as Team Supervisor. The year also saw the departure of Melanie Tumbokon and arrival of Kenny Bada to the team.

Significant changes in the immigration rules have been made to introduce mandatory refusals for 1, 5 or 10 years for some overstayer/illegal entrants who go on to make entry clearance applications depending on the way they left the country and those who have or are found to have used false documents in applications. At the same time the Home Office also revoked the DP2/93 and DP3/96 policies which enabled overstayers/illegal entrants whose marriages had not come to the attention of the Home Office for 2 years before enforcement action was taken to avoid enforcement action in certain circumstances.

In July 2008, the Home Office changed the age at which someone can apply for a marriage visa from 18 to 21 as part of a crackdown on forced marriage.

The five key proposals announced were to:

- ◆ raise the age of sponsorship for a marriage visa from 18 to 21;
- ◆ ask foreign spouses to enter into an agreement to learn English before they come to the UK;
- ◆ introduce a power to revoke leave to remain where there is evidence that the marriage route has been abused;
- ◆ require all sponsors to register their intention to marry overseas before they leave the UK; and
- ◆ ensure through a code of practice that specialist teams can identify vulnerable people at risk of forced marriage.

Tough new rules mean that some of our younger clients have to unnecessarily wait until both parties to the marriage have reached the age of 21 years of age. The new rule was challenged in the Courts but the argument that the new rule breached the married couples human rights have initially been rejected. We wait to see if there is any further development.

The new Points Based System has also been implemented over the past year. Under the points-based system, migrants must pass a points assessment before they can get permission to enter or remain in the United Kingdom to work or study. Points are awarded to reflect the migrant's ability, experience and age - and, when appropriate, the level of need in the migrant's chosen industry.

Over the year we have seen many of our clients continue to struggle to meet the difficult requirements imposed in changes in the law and increase in fees. Many clients in the UK on a spouse visa have not been able to meet the English language requirement by the time their 2 year leave to remain expires which forces them into the position of having to apply for further leave to remain instead of indefinite leave to remain, and they are forced to pay a separate fee for a further leave to remain application and then again when

8

they are in a position to apply for indefinite leave to remain. Many clients also continue to struggle to pay the Home Office fees, which have gone up in some categories by 100%, particularly domestic violence victims for whom the Home Office are increasingly refusing to waive the fee unless they are destitute.

Our funding with City Parochial to allow us to deal with vulnerable clients who have been subjected to domestic violence came to an end. However, we have applied for additional funding from City Parochial and remain hopeful that additional funding would be provided to assist victims of domestic violence whose cases often require greater investigation and preparation.

### Case Studies



#### Appeal victory as a result of domestic violence

AB entered the UK as the dependent spouse of her husband who was a student in the UK. AB was subjected to domestic violence by her husband which caused the breakdown of her marriage. AB submitted an application for leave to remain on the basis that she had been the victim of domestic violence. The Home Office considered AB's application outside the domestic violence rules as she had not entered the UK as the spouse of a person present and settled in the UK. The application was refused. The Law Centre assisted her with the appeal on the basis that AB had been subjected to domestic violence over a long period of time and that there was a risk that AB would be subjected to further harm if she returned to Bangladesh which would be in breach of her human rights. The Law Centre successfully argued that there was a serious risk of harm to AB and the appeal was allowed. AB was granted discretionary leave to remain in the UK.



#### Asylum seeker finds refuge from persecution

X is from China she had fled from China after suffering persecution from the authorities. Her parents had been practicing falun gong, the Chinese authorities had been persecuting people that shared and practiced that belief. X was detained for several months during which time she was tortured and she suffered horrific sexual abuse. Whilst she was in detention she was able to escape from a hospital and through the help of an agent she fled China and came to the UK. The Law Centre assisted her in claiming asylum and she been granted leave to remain in the UK as a refugee, she is now free to live safely in the UK.



#### Bangladeshi boy escapes ill treatment and gets fostered

A, a 10-year-old boy from Bangladesh, arrived in the UK with the assistance of an agent, his mother had passed away in Bangladesh and his father subsequently remarried. His stepmother subjected him to ill treatment and he came to the UK with the help of an agent, for his own safety. After he arrived in the UK he was abandoned by the agent and he was found outside a restaurant in Northampton. A met B who informed social services about his situation. She developed a close bond with A and became his foster carer. The Law Centre assisted A in making an application to the Home Office on the basis that he could suffer degrading or inhuman treatment if he was returned to Bangladesh, the application was refused but he has been granted discretionary leave to remain in the UK.

9



## EDUCATION

The Pan London Education Legal Advice Service (PLELAS) has been set up to provide specialist legal advice in the field of Education Law for communities across thirteen boroughs in London. We undertake casework covering exclusions, admissions and admissions appeals, Special Educational Needs, Disability Discrimination, Further and Higher education, bullying, complaints against schools, Local Education Authority's etc. We also represent clients at hearings and tribunals and provide second tier advice to voluntary and statutory organisations.

We also engage in project work, campaigning, providing information and working in partnership with other agencies in the following boroughs: Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Waltham Forest, Newham, Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge, Bexley, Greenwich, Havering, Kingston Upon Thames, Merton, Richmond Upon Thames and Wandsworth.

The group currently consists of Janata Ali, the full time group supervisor and Misha Pearson-Muir the full time caseworker. Tazrad Grey, the three days a week caseworker sadly left us to work for a Local Authority in London. We have been recently joined by Patrick Davies as a 4 day per week Caseworker.

We are working to build on established contacts and referral agencies and build new contacts in boroughs we have not worked in before. We also assist some clients with more severe mobility problems or disabilities by organising home visits.

We provide telephone advice to advisers in other local organisations and we also take referrals from these organisations. We have developed strong relationships with key referral organisations in some of the boroughs covered and hope to build on this in some of the new boroughs we are working in.

The group has a wide and varied caseload. Our strengths remain in the areas of special educational needs (SEN), exclusions, admission and children out of school cases. We continue to work very successfully on SEN cases that develop into tribunal cases at the First Tier Tribunal formerly known as SENDIST. We have been successful in securing special school places for pupils with SEN, in getting additional 1:1 Learning Support for pupils, Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy support for pupils. We continue to be very successful in our appeals against Local Authority decisions not to carry out a statutory assessment of children with SEN.

In terms of exclusion cases, i.e. getting the exclusion overturned and the child reinstated, success is still largely dependent on the facts of the case. We continue to see many children who have been excluded from school, who suffer from Special Educational Needs, which are not picked up or ignored by their school. We work to get children whose behaviour and learning is being affected by their SEN, more support in school and possibly a statutory assessment of their needs.

We have undertaken a significant number of admission appeals, with some successes; again the chances of success in these cases are dependent on the facts of the case.

We continue to have a steady number of cases referred to us for assistance and advice relating to a Further and Higher Education.

10

## Case Studies



### Speech and language therapy support gained for student

A boy with a severe language disorder and a statement of Special Educational Needs was not receiving the support he was entitled to through his statement. He was experiencing great distress at school because he was increasingly aware of his difficulties. His mother believed that he was not making progress at school and approached the Law Centre. We were able to ascertain that the school was not providing Speech and Language Therapy to the boy despite his language disorder and his statement. We submitted representations to the Local Authority who agreed to provide the Speech and Language Therapy sessions he had missed and put in place Speech and Language Therapy provision in line with his statement.



### Exclusion overturned for autistic pupil

A child with a diagnosis of Autism was permanently excluded from his special school for violence against staff and sexualised behaviour. The school was not able to provide the specialised support he required and excluded him permanently. At appeal the Governing Body Pupil Discipline Committee overturned the exclusion. The Local Authority subsequently placed the boy in a more suitable provision where his needs are being more appropriately met.



### School place found for child following Law Centre intervention

A primary school child was permanently excluded from school for fighting with another child. Following his permanent exclusion, the child did not receive any education for seven months despite requests from his mother and sister to the Local Authority for a school place at an alternative school. Following our intervention the Local Authority immediately put in place full time home tuition for the boy and offered him a school place. The boy has returned to school full time.



### Tribunal successes for parents seeking alternative teaching methods

We were successful in a number of SEND Tribunal appeals for changes in Part 4 (school place) and increased Learning Support Assistance provision. We currently have a number of SEND Tribunal appeals lodged for parents with children with Autism who want an alternative teaching method (Applied Behaviour Analysis/Verbal Behaviour Therapy) provided at school. This method is not used by the maintained schools the Local Authority has named in the child's statement. We will see in the coming months whether the Local Authority will fund this method of teaching children with Autism.



### Bullied child finally gets school place

A child who was severely bullied at school was refused admission to an alternative school. We drafted submissions to the Independent Appeal Panel setting out the client's case. The child was suffering from psychosomatic pains and general distress. The Independent Appeal Panel allowed the appeal and the child was admitted to the alternative school of his choice.

11



### Getting gains for vulnerable students

We successfully negotiated a reduction in the tuition fees of a vulnerable student who was an asylum seeker wishing to study at university.



## EMPLOYMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

Since the summer of 2008, Tower Hamlets Law Centre has been providing a free employment and discrimination law advice service covering Tower Hamlets, Redbridge, Havering, Newham and Barking and Dagenham. This service is provided by a specialist team of two Employment and Discrimination Law solicitors, Gordon Quilty (who works full-time) and Jacob Fabowale-Makinde (who works 3 days a week). They are assisted by a dedicated group of volunteers including Margaret Gordon, Qaisar Choudhury, Dianne Murphy and Jonathan Charwat. The team is funded by London Councils as part of their Employment Tribunal Advice and Representation Project, and also by the Equality and Human Rights Commission as part of their discrimination advice and casework project.

We have dealt with over 300 queries during the past year. The demand for our services is increasing from week to week, partly due to the current economic climate and also the need for free specialist advice and representation in the communities we work with. Our free specialist advice and representation has advised clients from across East London on a wide range of discrimination issues (employment and non-employment) and on more general employment law issues, including unfair dismissal; redundancy; unpaid wages; holiday pay; and discrimination on various grounds (including race, sex, pregnancy, disability, religion, sexual orientation and age).

During the year to mid-October 2009 we have been able to secure awards or settlements for our clients of over £80,000. Our service includes the provision of one-off advice, case preparation and, where possible, representation before Employment Tribunals (see "Case Studies" below). We have also established outreach sessions in some of the boroughs and have established a referral network with many local agencies. We continue to promote our service in order to ensure the widest possible access across the boroughs we cover. We also have an evening advice session at the Law Centre held every fortnight on a Monday, which is kindly supported by volunteers from City firm Norton Rose.

We liaise with our colleagues in other departments at the Centre, given that the areas of discrimination we advise on can arise in the work done by all the departments. We regularly receive queries from other departments regarding potential discrimination suffered by their clients.

In October 2009, the Equality and Human Rights Commission awarded us continued funding for discrimination casework for the next 18 months. This will enable us to continue to provide a valuable service and to assist even greater numbers of people across East London who are being discriminated against. We regularly review cases to assess whether any can be referred to the EHRC as a strategic case and have done so on a number of occasions.

12

### Case Studies



#### Unfair dismissal case victory

A client contacted us after being made redundant. We advised on unfair dismissal, and provided representation at the two-day Employment Tribunal hearing, where the Tribunal found she had been unfairly dismissed and awarded her over £10,000.



#### Company settles with disabled former employee

A client working for a company became disabled, which affected his attendance at work and necessitated various reasonable adjustments which his employer refused to make. He also suffered harassment on the grounds of his disability. We advised the client on disability discrimination and provided representation, successfully negotiating a Compromise Agreement which included a financial settlement of over £8,000.



#### Reinstatement for worker victimised after returning to work

Our client works in a factory and she was subjected to sex discrimination, victimisation and harassment from her line manager and company after she returned to work from maternity leave. The company refused her request to work day shifts and to continue with part-time night shift work despite their knowledge that she was a single parent and could not obtain childcare if working full-time on night shifts. We wrote to the company and outlined our concerns about the way the company is treating our client; the client also submitted a grievance about her treatment. The client was reinstated to her former part-time night shift hours.



#### Unfair dismissal settlement as employer offers conflicting evidence

Our client worked for the employer for over 22 months, he was dismissed with no notice and the reason given verbally for dismissal was different to the written reasons provided to us. We submitted a claim on his behalf for unfair dismissal. We prepared the case for hearing. The matter settled the week before the hearing for £8,000 through ACAS.



#### Religious discrimination claim nets £3,000 for client

Our client worked for the employer for 6 months before he was dismissed by his manager for requesting time off for a religious holiday. We advised the client on religious discrimination and filed a claim on his behalf. The employer settled the claim before the hearing for £3,000 with an agreed reference.



#### Employer settles to avoid Tribunal over disability discrimination

Our client worked in a manual role for a large company. He became physically disabled and was unable to perform his manual role. He was dismissed. We represented him in this matter, including submitting a claim to the Employment Tribunal for disability discrimination and unfair dismissal. Shortly before the hearing, at which we were due to represent the client, the matter was settled, with the client achieved a financial settlement and a favourable agreed reference.

13



## TOWER HAMLETS COMMUNITY ADVICE NETWORK

Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network is now in the second year of a three year Big Lottery funded project in the Advice Plus Programme. The aim of the project is to ensure effective, high quality, sustainable advice provision across the whole borough through joint working and formal partnerships.

Over the past year the THCAN project has continued to work towards the development of an ever improving advice and information service in Tower Hamlets. Our role is to offer support to other agencies in the borough by providing training to staff and volunteers, seeking to introduce joint procedures and protocols and building capacity through placements of Link Advisers.

The Link Team comprises the Link Manager and three Link Advisers who have been recently joined by a fifth team member working on London Council's funded projects. At the end of last year Tony Peck left the team to take up a debt advice post elsewhere. We were then joined for six months by Sherina Kabir on secondment from the housing group. In June 2009 we were joined by Mark O'Donoghue, replacing Tony and Toks Arabambi as our fifth team member.

A number of our partner advice agencies have identified innovative strategies for the best use of THCAN Link Advisers in developing their capacity. This has led to each adviser being able to work with more than one agency, giving greater opportunities for sharing good practice and partnership working and we are currently looking at ways of introducing better referral protocols, including the use of a web based system that will help ensure that clients receive a seamless service when being referred interagency. In addition to this work Link Team member Rukeya Khan has taken on a project delivering welfare benefits advice to Bengali mother's of children with learning disabilities and Abdi Ibrahim has been working to identify ways of delivering an expanded advice service to Somali clients in the borough.

Through THCAN we have delivered a number of free or low cost advice programmes working with specialist partner agencies who have delivered the training and pro bono partners who have provided training venues free of charge. In the spring we held a borough wide advice network conference with workshops concentrating on issues including new quality mark procedures, personalisation of care, public legal

14

education and Legal Services commissioning. The conference also looked at possible membership and governance structures for THCAN and allowed plenty of time for networking between agencies.

At the beginning of 2009 THCAN members joined with a number of other third sector agencies to set up a ChangeUp Consortium which secured a grant from the Lottery to deliver infrastructure support to the sector. Many of the projects flowing from this will be of benefit to THCAN members, concentrating on support around issues such as financial processes, improving governance and delivering quality services. The THCAN Link Manager represents the advice network on the consortium and has also recently been invited to sit on a panel set up to advise Tower Hamlets Council on the development and introduction of it's third sector strategy.

During the year a number of joint funding initiatives were considered and agencies worked together to make various funding bids. There have been information exchange sessions looking at the emerging tendering processes for LSC funding leading up to the formal bidding timetable in early 2010. In early 2010 THCAN will also consider the final report of the consultant engaged to consult with members on the best partnership/governance model to take the network forward.

15

## RECEPTION & REFERRAL SERVICES

The reception service is the first point of contact for the vast majority of people that will become clients of the Law Centre and for those that we signpost to other agencies, where we are unable to assist with a particular matter.

The reception team were busier than ever this year, assisting over 3,800 people by providing signposting and general help level information. We received much needed assistance from our THCAN colleagues Mark O'Donoghue and Toks Arabambi who also arranged referrals for members of the public with other agencies.

There were various comings and goings to and from the team over the course of the last year. Musthak Ahmed was successful in attaining a training contract with the Centre (he had previously been a volunteer and later a Casework Assistant with the admin team). We also said goodbye to Ugo Hayter who secured a training contract elsewhere. Our best wishes to them both in their progress to qualifying as fully fledged solicitors.

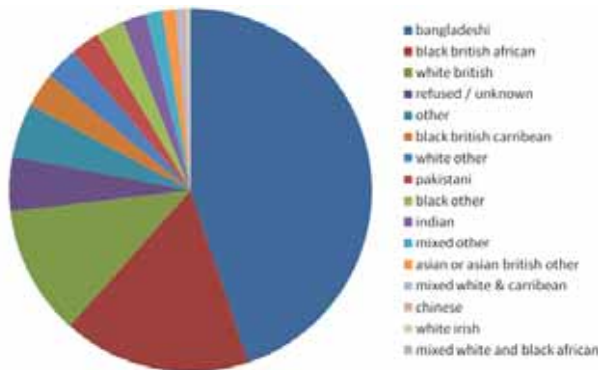
As this review goes to print Thaslima Begum our Casework Assistant will shortly take up maternity leave. In her place we have been joined by two young people who we were successful in finding funding to offer each a training opportunity with the team. They are Hafsa Begum and Mohammed Abby and they will provide some welcome additional support during their 6 month placement at the Centre.

The Centre was also successful in receiving a gift from law firm Freshfields Brukhaus Derringer due to our long standing relationship, towards the purchase and installation of IT and upgrading of our software. Both these additions will improve staff productivity and offer benefits to staff such as being able to work from home more effectively.

This year we have delivered specialist casework advice to over 1,900 people in housing, education, immigration, welfare benefits and employment & discrimination law. This represents almost a 20% increase on the same figure for the preceeding year.

Whilst this demonstrates a huge increase in service levels while utilising the same resources, the unrealistic level of fixed fee payments by the LSC for Legal Help clients has effectively resulted in a loss of income to the Centre!

The diagrams and statistics provide an outline the range of clients the Centre was able to assist and what we were able to achieve for them.



CLIENT PROFILE BY ETHNICITY

## STATS AND FACTS

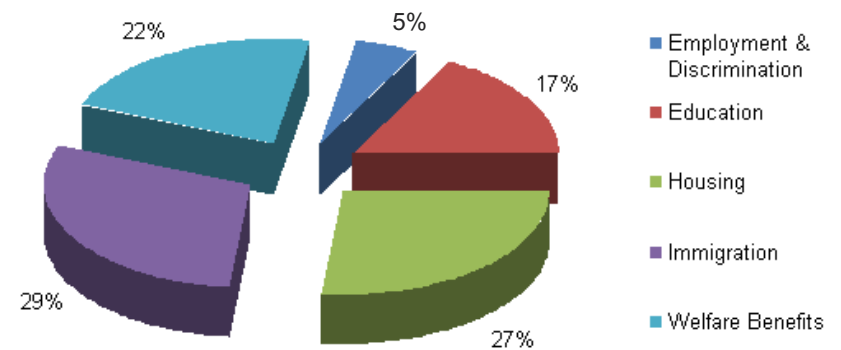
**25%** of our clients define themselves as having a disability

**59%** of our clients in the past year were women

This year we achieved over **£540,000** in financial gains for clients

Lump sum payments of benefits to clients in arrears totalling over **£92,000**

26 clients were successful in having over **£200,000** of debts written off



CLIENT PROFILE BY AREA OF LAW



## FINANCIAL REPORT

### Balance sheet as at 31 March 2009

	£	31 March 2009 £	£	Restated 31 March 2008 £
<b>Fixed Assets</b>				
Tangible fixed assets		41,245		54,932
<b>Current Assets</b>				
Debtors	182,294		135,834	
Cash at bank	181,357		184,248	
	<b>363,651</b>		<b>320,082</b>	
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>				
	(122,407)		(75,781)	
Net Current Assets		241,244		244,301
Net Assets		<b>282,489</b>		<b>299,233</b>
<b>Charity Funds</b>				
Restricted Funds		95,011		57,156
Unrestricted - General Funds		187,478		242,077
		<b>299,233</b>		<b>287,687</b>

(A full set of audited accounts are available on request)

### Statement of financial activities year ended 31 March 2009

	Restricted funds 31 March 2009 £	Unrestricted funds 31 March 2009 £	Total funds year ended 31 March 2009 £	Restated Total Funds Year ended 31 March 2008 £
<b>Incoming Resources</b>				
Incoming resources from charitable activities	813,878	455,955	1,269,833	981,814
Voluntary income	-	36,410	36,410	33,100
Investment income	-	13,001	13,001	4,118
<b>TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES</b>	<b>813,878</b>	<b>505,366</b>	<b>1,319,244</b>	<b>1,019,032</b>
<b>Resources Expended</b>				
Cost of generating voluntary income				
Governance Costs	-	10,459	10,459	29,665
Charitable Activities	776,023	549,506	1,325,529	977,821
<b>TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>	<b>776,023</b>	<b>559,965</b>	<b>1,335,988</b>	<b>1,007,486</b>
Net incoming resources / (resources expended) before transfers	37,855	(54,599)	(16,744)	11,546
Net incoming resources / (resources expended) after transfers	37,855	(54,599)	(16,744)	11,546
Net movements in funds for the year	37,855	(54,599)	(16,744)	11,546
<b>TOTAL FUNDS AT 1 APRIL 2008</b>	<b>57,156</b>	<b>242,077</b>	<b>299,233</b>	<b>287,687</b>
<b>TOTAL FUNDS AT 31 MARCH 2009</b>	<b>95,011</b>	<b>187,478</b>	<b>282,489</b>	<b>299,233</b>

## MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Law Centre is fortunate in having a committed and actively involved panel of members of its' management committee. Two members of the committee stood down during 2008-2009: Joanne Ferris and Gillian Megaughin. We thank them for their involvement on the committee and look forward to maintaining contact with them in the future.

We also appointed a number of new members to the committee during this period. They are Neil Corner, Commier Sampson, Jessica Moore, John Mikucki, Manuhar Ali, Mark Kalderon and Farid Uddin Ahmed.

The full list of members for 2008-2009 is as follows:

Md Derek Cox, **Chair**  
Abdi Abby, **Secretary**  
Abdus Salam, **Vice Chair**  
Neil Corner, **Treasurer**  
Joanne Ferris  
Sophy Miles  
Ajmol Ali  
Stephanie Dickinson  
Gillian Megaughin  
Commier Sampson  
Jessica Moore  
John Mikucki  
Manuhar Ali  
Mark Kalderon  
Farid Uddin Ahmed

Our appreciation and thanks go to all, particularly during a year when many more expectations have been made of members participation, both in the frequency of meetings and in the various sub committees that members have joined to progress the Centre's activities.

## PROBONO ASSISTANCE AND VOLUNTEERS

We are again indebted to the firms of solicitors that continued to support us this year with their resources, both in human form, through the LawWorks scheme and other in-kind support; and their generous financial support with particular projects.

In particular we should acknowledge the assistance of Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer and Norton Rose, both of whom provide their trainees to enable the Centre to run the popular advice session each Monday evening in Housing, Employment and General help. In total the Centre benefited from the help of 160 volunteers in the last year, assisting both our daytime service and the evening advice sessions.

Additional thanks to Simon Marciniak and Hayder Al Hassan from Miles & Partners for their professional support of the evening housing advice sessions. Hayder's long association with the Law Centre's evening surgery came to an end this year when he departed Miles & Partners. We thank him for his contribution over many years and wish him well.

### Daytime volunteers scheme

Our daytime volunteers scheme has two strands, both of which were maintained through the last year. The Legal volunteer role is now an established opportunity for students and practitioners alike to gain additional experience in a busy community legal advice setting - a precious commodity on the CV of anyone that seeks a training contract or is keen to keep their knowledge of the sector current and updated.

For those not at that stage, or others that wish to return to work, the Admin & Reception role offers an opportunity to gain general office experience. Takers for both roles are greatly sought after by our busy team of caseworkers and support staff!

We are extremely grateful to the following roll call of volunteers that started with us, left us and continued with us through the year: Fabeya Chowdhury, Farzana Ahmad, Sadia Khurshid, Ochwo Alecho, Romna Ali, Dianne Murphy, Channelle Ali, Michaela Dowe-Stephenson, Nilima Islam, Uzma Ahmed, Naomi Wiseman, Afsana Begum, Shumena Begum, Isma Khan, Tejal Roma Karia, Anjeli Shah, Qaisar Chowdhury, Shahinaz Mustafa, Thakmina Begum, Cianan Good, Fahima Khan, Rubia Khanom, Whitney Grossett, Jonathan Charwat, Rina Begum, Shabnam Chaudry, Ria Said and Margaret Gordon.

We would also like to thank the following institutions for their assistance with providing students with information on our scheme: London Metropolitan University, Queen Mary & Westfield College, Central University of Iowa, The College of Law, the BPP Law School and Tower Hamlets College.

Thanks must go to our volunteer Jonathan Charwat who was involved in organising the first of what will be an Annual Thames Walk to raise funds on behalf of the London Legal Support Trust. Funds are redistributed to not for profit community legal advice services such as this Law Centre. Our own Gordon Quilty helped with the fundraising by raising over 10% of this year's total by himself!



## AND FINALLY... OUR STAFF

Thanks to the staff team that provide the services and support that makes it all possible. In the past year a number of staff have departed, whom we wish well and extend our gratitude to: Tazrad Grey from the Education group, Philip Cridge and Denise Phillips our housing locums, Ugo Hayer the Housing Casework Assistant and Melanie Tumbokon from the Immigration team.

We also welcomed a number of new staff members to the team: Patrick Davies joins our education team as did our Legal Volunteer Dianne Murphy on a temporary basis. Kenny Bada joins immigration, while Shazina Hussain and Kathy Meade took up locum positions in housing. The THCAN project expanded with Mark O'Donoghue and Toks Arabambi joining the Centre. The housing team benefited from the secondment of trainee solicitor Cliff Flax, who comes to us from Freshfields while John Mahoney completed his training contract with the Law Centre and returned to his role at Community Links. Finally the admin team were joined by Hafsa Begum and Mohammed Abby, each on a 6-month training placement.

The full list of staff members for 2008-2009 is as follows:

Sue Brown, Centre Manager  
Bolaji Bishi, Senior Solicitor

### SUPPORT SERVICES

Shahnaz Hussain  
Thaslima Begum  
Dermot Morrow  
Hafsa Begum  
Mohammed Abby  
Lilian Byrnes

### WELFARE BENEFITS

Chris Parsons  
Amina Ali  
Prabhjit Soomal  
Shahnaz Sikondari  
John Mahoney (left)

### EDUCATION

Janata Ali  
Misha Pearson-Muir  
Tazrad Grey (left)  
Patrick Davies  
Dianne Murphy

### IMMIGRATION

Habib Rahman  
Melanie Tumbokon (left)  
Kanny Bada  
Musthak Ahmed

### HOUSING

Nicola Dean  
(maternity leave, now returned)  
Lou Crisfield  
Baljit Dod also img (mat. leave)  
Maria Mitchell (maternity leave)  
Sherina Kabir (maternity leave)  
Philip Cridge (left)  
Denise Phillips (left)  
Shazina Hussain  
Kathy Meade  
Ugo Hayter (left)  
Cliff Flax

### EMPLOYMENT & DISCRIMINATION

Gordon Quilty  
Jacob Fabowale-Makinde

### THCAN

Heather Johnson  
Rukeya Khan  
Abdi Daud Ibrahim  
Mark O'Donoghue  
Toks Arabambi

## Objectives and Activities

### The Law Centres principle aims are:

- ◆ To develop independent Law Centre services for the people of Tower Hamlets and East London.
- ◆ To provide access to justice and to facilitate the awareness of legal rights, particularly targeting the most disadvantaged members of the community.

### The main objectives and activities for the year continued to focus on the following:

- ◆ Delivery of specialist legal advice for those most disadvantaged in the local community.
- ◆ Provision of second tier support and advice for other generalist advice agencies in Tower Hamlets.
- ◆ Delivery of community education work to raise awareness of legal rights amongst local people.
- ◆ Development of new Legal Advice Services where there is a real gap in provision, in partnership with other advice providers.

### In order to maintain the integrity of our work despite external pressure, we have also re-developed our organisational values which are as follows:

- ◆ We believe everyone should have access to justice through quality specialist legal advice.
- ◆ We believe in equal opportunities for all in providing free advice to those who cannot afford to pay for it, regardless of their race, gender, ability / disability, sexuality, age or religious belief.
- ◆ We believe in prioritising our service where appropriate, particularly to those who are socially excluded and vulnerable.
- ◆ We believe in empowering people by raising awareness of their rights.
- ◆ We believe we should at all times, challenge bad practice, exclusion and inequality.
- ◆ We hold ourselves accountable to the community that we serve.

# YOUR LAW CENTRE. SERVING THE COMMUNITY



Staff of Tower Hamlets Law Centre 2008-2009. Not pictured are Musthak Ahmed, Abdi Daud Ibrahim and Jacob Fabowale-Makinde

## IN THE WORDS OF OUR CLIENTS...

*"You are all doing a marvelous job. Carry on the good work thank you very much. I can't thank you enough."*

*"My case has been dealt with successfully.  
I appreciate the service."*

*"Thanks for all your help and a big thanks to  
[my caseworker] who did everything he could do for me."*

*"...the service was perfect."*

*"Every one including the reception have be great to me.  
The service was superb."*

*"I thought that Tower Hamlets Law Centre gave me a first  
class service, which I put down to [my caseworker]. I found  
her very easy to talk to and she represented my case very  
well; which we won."*

*"I was very pleased with the service that I've received...  
there is nothing that I can recommend you to improve  
upon."*

*"I am very happy with the type of services that  
have been provided."*

*"The help and advice made my life much easier."*

*"Keep up the hard work you are doing."*