

legal action for the community



# coventry

law centre®



**impact report**  
2008 – 2009



# Contents

## Page

- 4 Our purpose
- 5 Report from the chair
- 6 Why Coventry needs a law centre
- 7 Achievements in 2008/09

## 2008/09 – the work we did

- 8 Community care
- 9 Debt
- 10/11 Immigration
- 12 Housing
- 13 Employment
- 14 Discrimination
- 15 Welfare rights
- 16 Finance report
- 17 Summary of accounts
- 18 Our team

*"I received an excellent service at all times. Thank you very much."*



Our receptionist, Narinder, is a familiar face to visitors to our office

# Our Purpose

To fight social exclusion in communities and to effect change in society by increasing rights awareness and using legal processes to fight poverty, inequality and discrimination.

## We will do this by:

Being active in communities and developing individual and community rights

Working in partnership with other advice agencies, voluntary organisations and community groups

Being accessible to vulnerable individuals and communities

Offering specialist, professional, high quality advice and representation

Treating clients and each other with respect, and building the confidence of individual clients and communities

Being independent and politically neutral, and always acting in the best interests of the client

Being flexible and adaptable to meet changing needs and emerging problems

## Thank you to our funders ...



Community  
Legal Service



The Baring Foundation



# Report from the Chair

Our plans for 2008/09 were principally about consolidation. We had faced a difficult time financially during the previous year and had taken steps to address the situation. However, we did not anticipate the economic recession which gathered pace during the year, and which has had a significant impact on everyone.

Advice services are critical at such times: changes in the housing market, combined with increased unemployment and reduction in credit availability have meant that the most vulnerable in society have seen their situation get worse, and they have been joined by a new group of people seeking our help because their economic situation has suddenly worsened.

I am pleased to say that we have been able to rise to the challenge and to find ways to respond to this situation.

In this context, we are very grateful to Coventry City Council, who continue to be the principal source of funding for the organisation. Its consistent support of the work of the Law Centre and its investment in the organisation over many years means that the city benefits from having one of the largest Law Centres in the country that undertakes not just a high volume of work, but offers broad range of expertise and is able to take on complex and challenging cases.

We were also assisted by The Charity Bank, who provided us with a loan when our cash flow position was extremely difficult.

As a result of this support, we were able to continue with our work and find new ways to respond to the needs of our community. We formed new partnerships with Coventry Building Society, Coventry Cyrenians and Whitefriars Housing Group which have enabled us to launch a new debt advice service. The timing of the launch of this new service has been critical in responding to the recession, which has meant that, increasingly, our clients have complex problems involving housing, employment and debt.

We also benefited this year from funding from The Baring Foundation. This funding was for a partnership project run in conjunction with other advice agencies and it is paying for improved IT infrastructure as well

as supporting a major piece of work using Systems Thinking methodology to streamline our processes and to try to create more capacity.

As always, we are very grateful to our other funders, the Legal Services Commission, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and the Big Lottery, for their continued support. I would also like to thank all our partner agencies in Coventry who have helped us to reach clients who may otherwise not have benefited from our help.

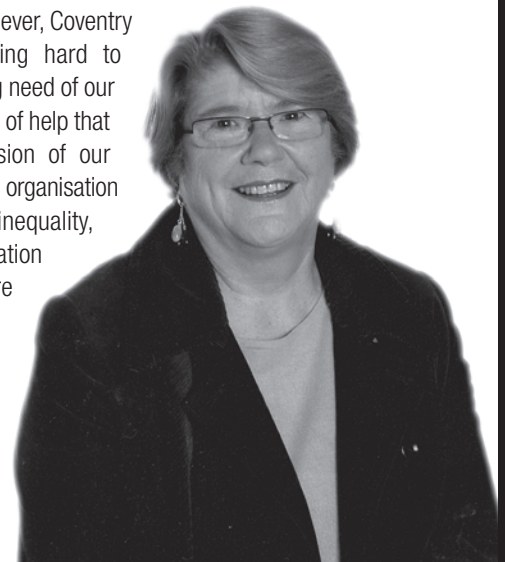
I have been very grateful once again for the help of my fellow Trustees in managing the Law Centre and I would also like to acknowledge the hard work and commitment shown by the staff throughout the year. The professionalism, dedication and loyalty shown by all those involved with Coventry Law Centre and the foresight and leadership of the Director are the reasons why it continues to maintain its reputation for excellence.

Finally, we were extremely sorry to lose David Stewart as a Trustee towards the end of the year. His support of the organisation and the expertise and knowledge that he brought from the financial sector were invaluable to us. We were very grateful for the time that he gave to us and the work that he did to help to strengthen the financial framework within which we operate. We wish him well.

At this time more than ever, Coventry Law Centre is working hard to respond to the growing need of our community for the kind of help that we can give. The vision of our founding Trustees of an organisation dedicated to fighting inequality, poverty and discrimination has never been more relevant.

## **Ros Mason**

Chair of the Management Committee



# Why Coventry needs a Law Centre

The relationship between an adviser and a client is critical in achieving a good outcome. Advice from an expert at the right time, and where that expert has enough time to build trust is critical.

This approach has recently been recognised as being very important by the Council on Social Action (CoSA), set up by the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, in 2007. CoSA has recognised that this type of one-to-one work, characterised by the importance of the human relationship in the delivery of services, is immensely powerful and transformative.

At Coventry Law Centre, we place emphasis on understanding the situation our clients find themselves in, and taking time to understand if they have problems in addition to the initial one that they present to us. We design our service to meet the needs of the person, not simply to tackle their most pressing problem.

The impact of the recession has meant that more and more people find themselves in need of our services. Over the past year we have seen a significant and exponential growth in clients, many of whom are not the client profile we usually see accessing our services.

People who had always been in work and able to afford a reasonable standard of living are now trying to seek advice on their problems. This has put additional pressure on our service as we try to balance new need alongside meeting the needs of the people who have always needed our services.

Traditionally, Law Centre clients have been the poorest, most disadvantaged people in our community, many have mental health problems and many are below the poverty line and are struggling to bring up families. We now have the situation whereby a new stream of people hit by the recession is seeking our help. Many have complex debt problems, and their homes and jobs are at risk.

Ordinarily we would see approximately 40-50 new clients in an average week, and we would give telephone or face to face to around another 40-50 who do not become clients. Now we are seeing the number of enquiries coming in to the Law Centre doubling. Increasingly, people have multiple problems, mostly around debt, housing and employment, and our Duty Solicitor Scheme at the County Court is coming under significant pressure: we have represented twice

as many people (250) in the last year as we did in the previous year.

We have increased the number of drop-in sessions that we run to try to cope and we have been able to attract funding to establish a new debt advice service.

We work very closely with other independent advice agencies in Coventry and, together, we have developed our partnership working to maximise access for clients and to ensure that they are successfully directed to the agency best suited to help them.

However, the increase in demand is affecting all of our partner agencies and waiting times are in turn causing extra work as clients 'shop around' all of us to try to find someone who can see them more quickly.

Our casework is more specialised than general advice work. We only take on cases that need the services of a solicitor or experienced caseworker. We take referrals from our partner advice organisations when the level of specialist knowledge required on a case exceeds the knowledge and skill of the other organisation.

We can offer the full range of legal advice from basic information through to court if necessary. The ability to go to court is essential in seeking to prevent a family or individual from being evicted for example, or to stop an unwarranted County Court judgement being placed against them.

Coventry Law Centre has been in existence for over 30 years. The impact of the recession on our community means that, more than ever, our services are needed by the people who live and work here. The remainder of this report gives an insight into the benefits brought to the city by the existence of its Law Centre during the last year.

A black and white portrait of Sue Bent, a woman with short hair and glasses, wearing a dark, patterned top. She is looking slightly to the left of the camera.

Sue Bent

# Achievements in 2008/09

Following several years of growth in our capacity, we maintained the number of cases we took on at a similar level to the previous year, although towards the end of the year we were increasing numbers to respond to demand. We ...


- Provided general advice and information to approximately **3,535** callers to our advice lines or to our offices. 850 people enquired about employment and discrimination, 275 enquired about housing issues, 110 about community care matters and 2,300 contacted us regarding immigration and asylum matters.
- Increased the traffic to our website for the fourth year running, with nearly **48,000** unique visitors and in excess of **129,000** page views. Approximately 155 people visit our website each day.
- Ran surgeries at which we advised approximately 300 people
- We worked on nearly **1700** new cases
- Approximately **1300** involved an application to court or to a tribunal
- Received £75,000 funding from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, which allowed us to continue discrimination casework, to train small businesses about discrimination in employment, and to undertake, in partnership with the University of Warwick, some research to understand the barriers faced by new communities settling in Coventry

## Partnership working

We have worked very hard during the year to develop our existing partnerships and to build new ones.

We continue to play a leading role in Advice Services Coventry (ASC). This is a group of advice agencies who are working together to improve advice services in the city. The Director of the Law Centre co-chairs this partnership. The group has been successful in bidding as a partnership for monies to strengthen advice services in the city.

- Received £146,463 from The Big Lottery Fund under its 'Advice +' programme. This was the first full year of three year's funding of a partnership project in the name of Advice Services Coventry (ASC), for which Coventry Law Centre is the lead agency. With this funding ASC has appointed a Co-ordinator, who reports to the Director of the Law Centre; partner agencies are running various projects, and Coventry Law Centre has employed a trainee solicitor.
- Received £7,623 from The Baring Foundation under its funding programme 'Strengthening the Voluntary Sector'. This was the first part of a two year grant totaling £191,000. This funding will support a range of activities aimed at strengthening the independence of the agencies who are members of ASC. These include working with Vanguard Consulting to undertake systems reviews, investment in IT systems to strengthen internal systems and to facilitate joined up working across the partnership, developing a stronger profile in terms of social policy work, undertaking a governance health check on each of the agencies and further developing links with community groups – particularly groups who are most vulnerable and likely to benefit from our services.



*“very good and friendly service”*

The Director of the Law Centre is the project manager for both projects being funded.

Each individual team within the charity has also worked to build on and develop their partnerships with other agencies. We continued to operate a variety of surgeries together with other agencies, and we formalised our referral arrangements to ensure that clients were transferred smoothly from those agencies.

## Development of staff

All staff continued to benefit from development and training to meet needs identified through the charity's staff appraisal process. In particular, a member of staff is being supported to undertake the conversion course prior to commencing solicitor training, and we are employing three trainee solicitors. One is supported by a grant from the Legal Services Commission, one by a grant from the Big Lottery, and one is directly funded by the Law Centre.

## 2008/09: the work we did

### Community Care

Our Community Care service provides advice and legal representation in situations relating to care services. This can be for children or it can be for adults who are ill or disabled and need care to help them cope with their situation. We work closely with partners like Coventry Carers' Centre, Age Concern and Coventry and Warwickshire Council of Disabled People, amongst others. Some cases that we worked on last year were:

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The Law Centre was approached by a woman who had taken in her son's friend, aged 15, after he had left his family home following the death of his mother. She requested that Social Services assess and provide financial support to enable him to stay on a long term basis. She was told that assistance would be provided however it was not forthcoming in any meaningful way.

We challenged the Local Authority by way of Judicial Review against the refusal to support a "child in need". The Court awarded interim payments be made to the Client and after a full hearing, some two years later, the Court awarded our Client fostering allowance to be backdated and to continue until the child becomes 18. This totalled over £20,000 in backdates alone.

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The Law Centre acted on behalf of a gentleman with a degenerative brain disorder with the consequence that his physical abilities were severely limited. When in hospital, having been admitted following deterioration in his health, he contacted the Centre with concerns about the care he was receiving at home prior to his admission. He alleged that his wife was abusing him, both emotionally and physically, and had requested that social services arrange a residential placement on discharge.

Social Services insisted that a residential placement was not appropriate and that he must return home. Clear evidence showed that this would not be appropriate to meet either his physical or

psychological needs however negotiations broke down with the consequence that Judicial Review proceedings were issued with an application for interim relief to prevent discharge until an appropriate placement was found.

The Court agreed that the client should not be discharged home and he was placed in a residential facility more than capable of meeting his needs. On agreement that the placement be made permanent proceedings were withdrawn.

The Client is now happily settled and his health has dramatically improved due to the care he is receiving.

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*"Keep up the good work,  
thank you so very much for  
your assistance"*



Julie Carter  
Vanessa Ball  
Ellen Leslie



## Debt

Debt advice is a new service that was launched at the end of the year. It is a welcome addition because the demand for debt advice at the moment is exceeding capacity at all agencies across the city. Debt advice complements particularly the work of the Welfare Benefits and Housing teams, as many clients will have problems in all three areas.

We are very pleased to be working in partnership with Whitefriars Housing, who are funding us to provide a debt advice service for their tenants. The service is free, confidential and impartial. It is organised on an appointment basis at the Whitefriars Local Housing Offices. Tenants are referred by their housing officer or can self refer and can also attend for an interview at the Law Centre if they prefer.

The two other main funders of our new service are Coventry Cyrenians and Coventry Building Society. Coventry Cyrenians is working with us to offer debt advice to their service users to help prevent homelessness and to help people they are supporting but who are preparing for independent living.

Coventry Building Society also hope to provide support for people who are struggling to keep up with their mortgage payments and, as with all clients, the objective is for early intervention to prevent cases being taken to court.

Although the service has only been running for three months we have already opened nearly 60 cases and closed 10. Here are a couple of early success stories.

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The Law Centre advised a Whitefriars Tenant who had several priority and non priority debts. The client had attempted to borrow money from a credit broker over the internet in order to pay their debts. This meant the client borrowing money from a company that would charge extortionate interest. We were able to get a full refund for the client and assist them in making affordable offers of repayment to her priority and non priority creditors.

We also wrote a letter to the court to explain why the client had overlooked buying a television license, and, through the completion of a financial statement, we were able to show the court how the client would be able to pay for her television licence in future. After the court

considered all of this information and also acknowledged the fact that the client was making efforts to deal with her situation they only fined the client £35.00. The maximum penalty could have been £1,000.

In addition we introduced the client to her local Credit union and she now has the facility to borrow money at a much more affordable rate should she need to. The client is now in a much better situation and feels that she has managed to get her financial situation under control. She is also making inroads into clearing her rent arrears.

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We advised a client whose mother had got into debt whilst suffering from the early onset of Alzheimer's disease. She was being pursued for money owed and this was the second time that the same company had tried to pursue her even though they were aware from the first instance that she did not have mental capacity at the time that she took on the debts.

We were able to get medical evidence from the client's mother's GP that explained the circumstances of the client's mother at the time she took on the debts. This was presented to the creditor along with a letter that showed that this was the second time that the company had attempted to recover debts from this individual. In the face of this evidence the company backed down and agreed to write the debt off.




Peter Burgher  
Philip Dolan

## Immigration

The immigration team has thrived in the last year. We have significantly increased the work we do with vulnerable children and victims of domestic violence. We have also increased the numbers of cases we take to the Court of Appeal and the High Court.

### How we worked in partnership with other agencies

- We have worked with the Coventry Domestic Violence Partnership to deliver training to enable people on the frontline to help victims of domestic violence.
- We have worked with the Coventry Primary Care Trust and the Coventry Refugee Centre to deliver training in the asylum process
- We have worked with students at Warwick University on immigration law. The students worked with clients once a week during term and assisted approximately 90 people.
- We work closely with the Children's Teams of Coventry City Council, Warwickshire County Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to assist unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- We have worked with the New Communities Forum in Coventry to raise awareness of rights and responsibilities of asylum seekers and refugees
- We continue to work with the Asylum and Refugee Steering Group of the Coventry Partnership
- We have had to work with the Human Trafficking Unit of the UK Border Agency
- We continue to work with a wide range of agencies within Coventry who refer clients to us



*"How do you improve on perfection?"*

### How we help clients

The Coventry Law Centre's immigration team has advised and represented 544 clients in the last year.

We have undertaken about 150 appeals before the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal. We have also represented clients at the High Court and the Court of Appeal.

We have remained a part of the Early Advice Project which has been jointly run by the Legal Services Commission and the UKBA.

We have won over 40% of Legal Services Commission funded appeals before the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT). This is significant because the AIT allows between 18 to 20% of the appeals it hears.


Examples of cases we have taken on this year are:

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Our client is a 16 year old unaccompanied asylum seeker who has fled from Afghanistan fleeing the Taliban. He was referred to the Law Centre by Warwickshire Social Services. His case was initially refused by the Home Office as they argued that he could rely on other family members for support, even though he did not know where they were. He was advised to contact the Red Cross/Crescent to see if they could locate his family and to make his enquiries through the Afghan community. He eventually learnt that they were living illegally in Pakistan and informed Social Services accordingly. It was held at the AIT therefore that he could not return to Afghanistan as he has nobody there from whom he could obtain protection, and that it would not be reasonable for him to expect to relocate to Kabul alone. He was granted refugee status in the United Kingdom.

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Our client came to the UK from Iraq in March 2002 and claimed asylum. He did not receive a decision in his case until December 2003 and his application was refused in contravention of stated Home Office



*"I am grateful to all the staff I had contact with. Friendly and professional at all times"*

policy at the time. He went through numerous appeals and was unsuccessful each time. His support was discontinued and he was made homeless. He instructed the Law Centre who sent numerous letters asking that the error be rectified but he received a further decision in May 2009, again not implementing the correct policy. The Law Centre applied for a judicial review of the decision and, before the case was heard at court, the decision was withdrawn and he was granted indefinite leave to remain.

Our client is an Afghan child aged 15. He came to the UK in December 2008 and claimed asylum. His father had been beheaded by the Taliban in front of him two years previously as it was believed that he was an informer. His brother then disappeared one month later. His mother suffered a breakdown and became mentally unstable and, as he was her only remaining son, confined him to a room in his maternal uncle's house. His application for asylum was refused and the Coventry Law Centre obtained a report from a regional expert corroborating the details of his story and confirming that he would be at risk on return to Afghanistan. As a result of this he was granted asylum on appeal.



*“a great service for the people of Coventry”*

Back – Robert Bircumshaw, Indrani Currie, Kieran Laird;  
Front – Ravinder Sandhu, Jennie Bailey

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Our client came to the UK in 2006 with a two year visa as the spouse of a British national. Her husband did not allow her to apply for indefinite leave to remain - instead applying for an extension of one year and then allowing her leave to lapse. She was subjected to domestic abuse and she and her three young children were removed from the family home and placed in a refuge. During criminal proceedings against her husband he followed her back to the refuge she was staying at and was seen on CCTV damaging the car of a worker there. She was moved to a different refuge and instructed the Coventry Law Centre who assisted her to obtain indefinite leave to remain.



*“Without the service you provide, people like me would have nowhere to turn to for help”*



## Housing

The Housing team prioritises cases where the client's home is under threat. The team offers both advice and representation in the County Court and we operate the solicitor duty scheme at the County Court on housing possession days.

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Our client is a tenant of a local Registered Social Landlord where she lives with her two teenage daughters. In March 2008 she was convicted of drug-related offences and sentenced to 3½ years in prison. The landlord issued possession proceedings against her and her family due to the illegal behaviour.

She approached the Law Centre by correspondence from prison and arrangements were made to visit her. We found out that the conviction was an isolated incidence of dealing drugs which our client became involved in after immense financial pressures caused by debt. She admitted and regretted her crime, had no previous history of any such behaviour and had been an exemplary prisoner. In addition, the eviction would have had a devastating effect on our client's children who had suffered considerable upheaval in the previous 5 years due to the violence of our client's ex-partner. A possession order would have meant that they would be left homeless, with the youngest of them likely to end up in Local Authority care.

The Law Centre defended the case and, at a final hearing of the matter, obtained a suspended possession order on the basis that she commits no further crimes from her tenancy, giving the client a final chance to reform her behaviour while maintaining the family home for her and the children. Furthermore, as a result of previous work that the Law Centre had done to settle this matter, our client was able to avoid an order for costs which would have only served to worsen her debt position.

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We are dealing with an increasing number of cases where possession is sought on the basis of illegal or anti-social behaviour. In many of the cases the behaviour results from

mental health issues or some form of extreme stress on the family concerned. The Housing Team can in most cases successfully defend the possession proceedings. Further advice provided by the welfare benefit, debt and community care teams at the Law Centre can help to ensure that the tenants keep to any agreement made.

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Our client rented a property from a private landlord. She had a shorthold tenancy. At the start of the tenancy she paid the landlord a tenancy deposit of £600. Since April 2007 private landlords have been required to protect tenancy deposits paid in respect of shorthold tenancies in a tenancy deposit scheme within 2 weeks of the deposit being paid. After she had been in the tenancy for some months our client's landlord had still not done this and he indicated to our client that he had no intention of returning the deposit at the end of the tenancy. At this point she sought advice from the Law Centre. We advised her that, as the deposit had not been placed in a scheme within 14 days of its being paid, she could apply to the County Court for an order that the deposit be placed in a scheme and that she should be paid three times the deposit because of her landlord's failure to comply with the legislation. The application was made. By this time the landlord had placed the deposit in a scheme, nearly 6 months after it had been paid. The Court hearing went ahead and the landlord was ordered to pay our client £1800.

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The legislation requiring deposits to be held in schemes was enacted because about 20% of private landlords did not return deposits to tenants at the end of the tenancy, even in cases where there were no rent arrears or any other reason to withhold the deposit. Most landlords are complying with the current legislation. However

significant numbers of clients are approaching the Law Centre for advice where deposits have not been placed in schemes.

The legislation is not very well drafted and what should be straightforward and quick small claims cases are often taking more than 6 months to get through the Court system.



Aman Guru, David Reilly, Gay Burridge,  
James Stewart, Davinder Johal

## Employment

The employment team offers advice and assistance to clients on a wide variety of employment matters ranging from unlawful deduction of wages to unfair dismissal. The level of service the team is able to offer varies from one-off advice, assistance with tribunal claims to full representation at tribunal hearings where necessary.

Examples of cases we have taken on this year are:

We had a group of clients who had all worked via an agency for a large department store as security guards or cleaners. They had all worked for a couple of months but had not received any wages. They were told by the agency that there were difficulties in processing their wages and that payment would be made. However, not all the clients were able to continue working for the employer due to the fact that they had no income coming in. We were able to assist them in writing letters of grievance to the employer and to lodge claims for unlawful deduction of wages at the Employment Tribunal. In all cases we were able to negotiate settlement and the clients received their outstanding wages in full.

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Our client had been employed as a steward for a number of years at a local football club. During a game it was alleged that he had an altercation with some away fans and he was instantly dismissed without any pay. Our client had enjoyed a good working relationship with his employer prior to this event and was extremely upset that he had been dismissed without any opportunity to defend himself. We were able to advise the client that their dismissal was unfair because the employer had failed to follow a fair procedure. We assisted the client by negotiating with his employer which resulted in him being reinstated and given his outstanding pay.

***“Thank you for all your help & great advice. Having a mental health difficulty, you made things a lot easier for me”***

***“Thanks to my professional, understanding caseworker the outcome of my case was successful”***



Tracy Meadows  
Elayne Hill  
Fiona Almazedi

## Discrimination

Our Employment solicitors, Elayne Hill and Fiona Almazedi, and Tim Astley, who was our Disability Rights worker, take on cases where discrimination has occurred in employment or where someone is accessing goods or services - and we received funding from the newly formed Equalities and Human Rights Commission to support this work.

During the year we delivered training for employers to raise awareness of equalities in the workplace and took on cases where discrimination had occurred in relation to race, religion and belief, age, gender, sexual orientation and disability. Some of the cases we assisted in were:

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Our client worked for a large national company as a driver. A race discrimination claim was issued after the client was dismissed for not having a UK driving licence. The client was not offered alternative work within the company despite jobs being available. The client had been employed based on his overseas licence and was prepared to take another test. We negotiated on behalf of the client and secured £5,000 settlement and the offer of his job back.

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A Disability Discrimination (DDA) claim was made against a public house over their wheelchair accessible side entrance being blocked by moveable bins on days when rubbish was collected. Prior to proceedings being issued the case settled with an £800 compensation payment and the agreement that reasonable adjustments would be made in that the rubbish bins would not be placed in same position again.

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Another DDA claim was lodged over discrimination on buses, including failure to stop, failure to assist in boarding and failure to afford sufficient priority to wheelchair passengers. This case involved proceedings being commenced against the bus company. However, after lengthy negotiations, we were able to settle the case with compensation of £12,500 plus costs.

Our client was a care worker and had been diagnosed HIV+. Unfortunately during her employment she became severely ill with an HIV related illness and was hospitalised for a period of six months. During this time her doctors kept in touch with her employer and she was assured that her job was still available. After she had been discharged from hospital her employment was terminated by letter without any notice. This case settled prior to a hearing and our client secured her full notice pay and £5,000 compensation for Injury to her feelings.

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*“you are very good to help people, keep it up”*



*“No further suggestions, I was very happy with the service I received”*

## Welfare Rights

Our welfare rights team concentrates on appeals against benefits decisions. We take referrals from other advice agencies when their clients have been refused benefit or wish to challenge the amount of benefit awarded to them.

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Our client came to see us because he had been refused Disability Living Allowance and had appealed against the decision. We advised and represented him at a Disability Appeal Tribunal. His appeal was successful and he was awarded the higher rate mobility component and the middle rate care component because he was virtually unable to walk and required continual supervision throughout the day. This meant an increase in benefits of £96.20 per week. We also advised that this could lead to an increase in benefit for himself and his wife as they were receiving pension credit and she was also in receipt of the middle rate care component of Disability Living Allowance. They were entitled to an increase in their pension credit of £105.70 per week because of their severe disability. This meant that their increase in benefits and credits amounted to £201.90 per week. We further advised on the possibility of additional pension credit entitlement of the carer addition which could add another £59.00 per week to their entitlement. The arrears to date have totalled over £7,800.00.

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A client asked us for advice and representation regarding an appeal against refusal of Housing Benefit. The Housing Benefit Department had decided that his tenancy was not on a commercial basis because he had previously known the landlord. We interviewed the client and obtained all the necessary information for preparation of the Appeal. The Tribunal accepted the arguments put forward on his behalf and allowed the Appeal. He received Housing Benefit of £50.00 per week and arrears of over £2,200.00. This avoided any danger of him losing his home.

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*"The way you dealt with my mother was wonderful. She felt safe and confident and you made her feel comfortable any time we came to your office"*

*"I consider the centre to be very well run without any unnecessary waffle & the staff showing a genuine concern"*

Katherine King  
Danny Fearn  
Frank Newbold



# Finance Report

During 2007/08, the Charity had been negatively affected by external changes that had impacted on its ability to bill for immigration work undertaken. This, along with changes to fixed fees for Legal Services Commission casework, meant that reserves were significantly depleted during the year. However, the charity moved into 2008/09 with stabilised finances but an imperative to manage these very tightly to strengthen the organisation during the year.

In order to ease cash flow difficulties, the charity secured a loan with the Charity Bank and agreed a restructuring of its grant from Coventry City Council. These two steps, combined with tight management control enabled the charity to move forward positively and an overall net increase in funds of £154,444 was achieved for the year.

The challenges described above in relation to the expansion in immigration work and the changes in fixed fees for casework created an imperative for the charity to manage expenditure within budget and to seek additional funds during the year.

Success in obtaining funding from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission for 2008/09, along with continued funding from Big Lottery, helped to support continued financial stability.

## Principal sources of funding

The main source of funding for the charity is the fees paid by the Legal Services Commission (LSC) for work undertaken for clients who are eligible for legal aid. This covers approximately 70% of the clients assisted. As highlighted earlier in the report, the LSC is implementing significant changes in the way it contracts with the providers of legal aid services and it will be critical that the Law Centre evolves and adapts to meet any new requirements.

Coventry City Council continues to represent a significant source of funding for the charity. The Trustees are very grateful to the Council for its consistent support of the work of the Law Centre. Its

investment in the charity over many years has allowed the Law Centre to grow and develop and, in this year, it gave us invaluable additional support by allowing us to restructure our grant to even out our cash flow.

The funding from Coventry City Council allows the Law Centre to undertake the rights awareness raising work which is critical to reaching those who are most vulnerable and socially excluded; as well as allowing representation at tribunals where these are not funded by the Legal Services Commission; and free advice and casework for people on low incomes, but who do not qualify for legal aid.


As mentioned above, we also received funding from the newly established Equalities and Human Rights Commission that enabled us to continue our work in relation to discrimination.

We also received funding from The Baring Foundation and The Big Lottery. Both these sources of funding were to support the work of Advice Services Coventry, the city wide advice partnership. The Law Centre benefited indirectly from this, but the majority of the funding was paid out to other partners, or to consultants.

Towards the end of the year, we secured new funding from Coventry Building Society, Coventry Cyrenians and Whitefriars Housing Group for a debt advice service to start early in 2009/10.

We will continue to operate the services described in this report, subject to continued funding. Increasing efficiency in the main areas of activity will continue to be a priority as will identifying new sources of funding in order to help to support continued financial stability into the coming year.

Coventry Law Centre has received an unqualified audit from its auditors and a full set of the company accounts can be inspected at the Law Centre.



Wendy Stanyon  
Tricia Dowd



Bridget Griffith



# Summary of Accounts

	<b>2009</b>	<b>2008</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Incoming resources</b>		
Coventry City Council grants	495,392	483,308
Legal Services Commission	480,191	538,947
Interest	4,076	12,843
Miscellaneous	2,663	1,495
Big Lottery grant	146,463	65,231
NRF	71,956	269,757
DRW grant	0	50,384
EHRC grant	75,000	33,500
The Baring Foundation	7,623	0
	<b>1,283,364</b>	<b>1,455,465</b>
<b>Resources expended</b>		
Staff costs inc. pension, training & recruitment	714,117	1,063,382
Premises costs	52,102	57,050
Consultant & court expenses	103,421	103,966
Depreciation	10,788	14,039
Subscriptions & publications	15,796	21,114
Insurances	4,219	4,905
Telephone, printing, stationery & postage	25,243	32,057
Other costs	24,195	35,136
EHRC survey costs	5,500	0
NRF	71,956	256,080
Discrimination Video Project	0	9,802
Big Lottery	95,848	41,766
The Baring Foundation	5,735	0
	<b>1,128,920</b>	<b>1,639,297</b>
<b>Net incoming resources</b>	<b>154,444</b>	<b>-183,832</b>
<b>Fund balances carried forward</b>	<b>-50,205</b>	<b>-204,649</b>
<b>Analysis of fund balances</b>		
Unrestricted funds	305,592	210,535
Pension Reserve	-365,000	-418,000
Restricted funds - Big Lottery fund	6,640	0
Restricted funds - Legal advice booklet fund	2,250	2,250
Community Legal Service development fund	115	368
Server fund	0	0
Heart of England	198	198
	<b>-50,205</b>	<b>-204,649</b>

# Our team

## Management Committee Staff

Ros Mason (Chair)  
Andrew Williams  
David Stewart (resigned 6 March 2009)  
Jeanette Whyman  
Tessa Roxburgh  
Kevin Foster (resigned 7 May 2008)  
Harinder Bahra  
Roger Hughes (appointed 23 May 2008)  
Linda Bigham (appointed 25 June 2008)


## Members

Laurence Arnold – Coventry and  
Wawickshire Council of Disabled People  
Marcus Lapsa – Councillor  
Fred Davies – Trades Council  
Mia Docker – Grapevine  
Mike Fowler – Coventry Cyrenians  
Moirra Pendlebury – Coventry Age  
Concern  
Sobia Shaw –Panaghar  
Kay St Clair- MIND

## Staff

Sue Bent (Director)  
Fiona Almazedi (started 02/06/08)  
Tim Astley  
Jennie Bailey  
Vanessa Ball  
Balvinder Budesha (left 09/01/09)  
Rob Burcumshaw (started 01/12/08)  
Gay Burrridge  
Julie Carter  
Indrani Currie  
Patricia Dowd  
Danny Fearn  
Mo Gibb (left 04/04/08)  
Bridget Griffith (started 23/02/09)  
Elayne Hill  
Davinder Johal  
Javeria Ijaz  
Kieran Laird  
Susie Lane (left 16/01/09)  
Riffat Malik (left 30/09/08)  
Tracy Meadows  
Bob Murray (left 15/07/08)  
Frank Newbold

Gina Pattinson  
Dave Reilly  
Ravinder Sandhu (started 16/06/08)  
Narinder Shergill  
Wendy Stanyon  
James Stewart  
Robert Taylor (left 31/07/08)



*“As it was my first contact with the Law Centre I wasn’t sure what to expect but on meeting the staff my worries went away.”*



For advice details call reception on 024 7622 3053

**debt**  
**community care**  
**employment**  
**housing**  
**immigration**  
**welfare benefits**

**Coventry Law Centre**

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