London Legal Support Trust –
London Specialist Advice Forum meeting

2-3pm, Tuesday 28th November 2023

Chair: Nezahat Cihan, London Legal Support Trust

This document contains detailed notes from November's London Specialist Advice Forum meeting.

They are divided by headings so you can skip to the part most relevant to you. There is also a full recording of the Forum session available here.

1. **Nezahat Cihan, London Legal Support Trust**: Welcome and Reflections on 2023
2. **Sara Cooney, Lloyds Bank Foundation**– Information on upcoming funding
3. **Phil Jew, Cost of Living Advice Project –** Presentation on learning and insights from Year One of the project.
4. **Sector stories and achievements:** Eddie Coppinger- University House Legal Advice Centre
5. **Sector stories and achievements:** Katie Wood- Maternity Action
6. **Sector stories and achievements:** Sara Taylor- Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre
7. **London Legal Support Trust:** AOB

1. Nezahat Cihan. London Legal Support Trust: Welcome and Reflections on 2023

Presentation slides here

a) Introduction:

- We operate in a complex and demanding sector, and today presents an opportunity to reflect on and appreciate the accomplishments of the entire year.
- Today is not just about acknowledging individual achievements, but also about recognising the collective effort and collaboration within our sector throughout the year.
- The significance of partnership and collaboration cannot be overstated, especially in the highly competitive environment we all navigate. Our success is inherently tied to our ability to work together rather than in isolation.

b) On the Robust Safety Net- Advice Workforce Development Fund

- One piece of collaboration work that we do with other funders is the Advice Workforce Development Fund which is a partnership with a list of key funders.
- This collaboration started back in 2019 with research conducted by Advice Service Alliance , which identified multiple challenges affecting London's advice services and contributing to a workforce crisis in the sector.
- Funder discussion on the findings of this research led to the collaboration with sector representatives such as Advice UK, Law Centres Network and London Citizens Advice forming a steering group and commissioned research looking at key solutions. **(See slide 6)**
- The recommendations derived from this research informed the development of the Advice Workforce Development Fund.

- You can find out more about the project and work here

2. **Sara Cooney, Lloyds Bank Foundation**– Information on upcoming funding

Presentation slides here

a) Introduction:

- We are an independent charitable trust funded by the Lloyds Banking Group.
- Our focus has been on working in partnership with small local charities, communities and individuals in forming a more fair and just society and over the years we have focussed more on issues people face in their communities.

b) Specialist Programme details

- This is a programme that we run annually, the 2024 programme is currently open for application.
- What we are offering is a combined and integrated offer of a 3 year grant of £75,000 unrestricted together with a wide range of organisational development support.
- We expect that we will be funding around 84 charities across England and Wales and that would be a total investment of £6.3m
- **Deadline for application is 5pm, Thursday 25th January 2024**
- **Decisions made by Friday 24th May 2024**

c) What do we mean by specialist

- We are looking to work with an organisation whose primary purpose is addressing one of the 8 themes and is reflected in your objectives.
- These themes includes: Addiction, Care leavers, Domestic abuse, Homelessness, Offending , Asylum Seekers and Refugees, Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, Trafficking and Modern Slavery

d) Eligibility Criteria

- You need to meet the Criteria you can find out more here.
- We are looking to work with charities who are working with people over a longer period of time, who are person-centred and understand the individual need and challenges of people
- Examples of this is an addiction charity providing 1:1 support and a structured programme and also developing relationships with other services in the community

e) Application Process

- You can find out more about the application process here

f) Other Programmes in 2024

- Racial Equity Programme- open March 2024
- d/Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation Programme- open June 2024

Q&A:

- *Q: We work with a number of grassroots organisations you mentioned a specialist quality mark, with immigration being one of them. Is this a requirement for other advice organisations?*
  A: No, this requirement only applies if you are applying under the refugee and asylum seekers theme.

- *Q: What was thinking behind reducing the income level?*
  A: We considered our limited budget and have been thinking about how we can best use the funding.

- *Q: Currently you have said only people applying under the 'asylum and refugee' strand require OISC but if applicants are a trafficking organisation who receive people asking for advice they are likely to have a huge number of people from migrant background. Would you not expect them to have accreditation from a quality standpoint?*
  A: Not necessarily; for the trafficking organisations that we work with if they are providing immigration advice it is required but if you are an organisation with a different range of support, we wouldn't be expecting that.

3. **Phil Jew, Cost of Living Advice Project –** Presentation on learning and insights from Year One of the project.

Presentation slides here

a) Introduction:

- The GLA funded the Cost of Living Advice Project for the past year. It started after the Advising Londoners report written for the GLA. This report led to the program and other initiatives.
- The project is a partnership supported by the GLA to help the London Legal Support Trust and Citizens Advice London increase the capacity of advice agencies. This is to better respond to the cost-of-living crisis and assist more Londoners.
- The first year of the project began in September 2022 with a total funding of £2.3 million. GLA has granted an additional £2.5 million for the second year.
- The Project supports the GLA's mission to build a "Robust Safety Net" so that by 2025, every Londoner is able to access the support they need to prevent or alleviate financial hardship.

b) Project Methodology:

- Advice Provision: We have Crisis Prevention Advisers and Specialist Welfare Advisers working at local Citizens Advice, while Law Centres and community advice agencies employ various roles such as Apprentices, Crisis Navigators, Casework Assistants, Paralegals, Supervisors, Advisers, Caseworkers, and Solicitors.
- Citizens Advice Advice First Aid (AFA) program, coordinated by Citizens Advice Wandsworth, provides training locally to enhance capabilities and connections with community and faith agencies.
- To broaden our impact, local Citizens Advice, Law Centres, and other funded agencies are encouraged to collaborate closely with community and faith agencies. They also participate in local activities and events related to the cost-of-living crisis to extend their reach.

c) Advice and Information Provision:

- The first year of the Project (to end August 2023), 31,677 Londoners were helped: 19,479 with the generalist or specialist advice (24% specialist), 4715 supported at CoL events and 7483 attending CoL events.
- The financial improvement for Londoners as a result of advice provided under the project was £9.5million. Against the £2.3 million invested in the Project by GLA,

there was a 1:4 gain for Londoners: For every £1 invested by GLA there was a £4.13 financial improvement for Londoners.
- On average, each client who benefited from generalist of specialist advice saw their finances improve by £488.

d) Extended Reach
- We also found that the project has extended the reach for advice services and reaching communities.
- New clients being reached include carers, older people, vulnerable people, disabled people, single parents, street homeless people, and members of Muslim and Eastern European communities. **(See slide 8)**

e) Engagement/Community Groups
- The work with faith and community groups have been effective and has over 2000 groups engaged with the project and 43% were new organisations.
- There has been learning on how best to support those communities such as holding regular meetings, workshops, and training such as Advice First Aid and outreach sessions and building the trust with the community,
- At the same time, there are barriers such as lack of capacity, some of the KPIS are focused on the delivery of advice rather than building relationships, and some mistrust and staff turnover.

f) Referral Pathways
- We have seen the growth of referral pathways between advice agencies and community and faith agencies **(see slide 9).**

g) Overall Conclusion
- The project has been crucial in supporting Londoners during the cost-of-living crisis. It aligns with the Robust Safety Net mission, offering a positive return on investment for GLA.
- Despite enhancing mobilisation and collaboration through funding partnerships, the single-year funding cycle poses challenges for agencies.
- The project's approach, including collaboration with community and faith agencies, advice first aid training, and cross-borough work, has proven effective. These efforts have led to improved services, expanded outreach, and better accessibility for Londoners seeking advice.

Q&A

- *Q: In terms of the advice given, is it benefits advice or wider advice?*
  A: It is pretty broad but as you would expect the top advice is welfare benefits, housing, and debt. There are a range of different roles in the project such as crisis prevention advisors who provide signposting to services, right up specialist intervention and the majority of this is welfare benefits specialists.

- *Q: As we see changes in the economy and changes in the cost of living crisis, more people with more debt, especially with mortgages, what impact does it have on the development of this project?*
  A: It would need to be monitored and we will hold regular get-togethers to understand and focus on the policy issues of the project. The uniqueness of this project is that it allows for pan-London learning and we hope to look at it closely.

- *Advice agency comment (delivery partner under the project): It would be good to measure the outcomes of Year 1 against the results for Year 2 because I think the results we got in Year 1 will be tougher to get in Year 2, the help that was available for people in Year 1 is tougher for people now. This is something we will consider for Year 2 as the profile of these outcomes have changed.*

4. **Sector stories and achievements**: Eddie Coppinger- University House Legal Advice Centre

a) Achievement of the year:

- In terms of this year's achievements, we are supporting up to 25 apprentices in collaboration with sister organisations.
- Most of them are funded by donations from corporate partners, covering expenses such as exams, courses, and assessments.
- However, these funds do not cover salaries. Our main focus has been supporting those on a salary and individuals already working in the sector.
- I want to highlight the significance of SQEs and qualifying work experience, emphasising their differences from a training contract. Further details can be found here and here

5. **Sector stories and achievements:** Katie Wood- Maternity Action

a) Achievement of the year:

- This reflects on a three-year casework service project launched in 2020, focused on supporting new mothers at work, ensuring job retention, and preventing workforce issues.
- We provided telephone and email advice regarding parental rights and welfare benefits. The casework service, staffed by legally qualified individuals, initially addressed safety concerns for pregnant women during the early days of the pandemic.
- Post-pandemic, we observed increased redundancies and employers targeting pregnant women.
- Throughout the project, we successfully secured £2.4 million for unpaid work and achieved positive outcomes in health and safety, negotiated flexible work arrangements, and reinstated some women following dismissal.
- More details about the case Maternity Action supported here

6. **Sector stories and achievements:** Sara Taylor- Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre

a) Achievement of the year:

- This year has presented challenges for our clients, but we've secured funding for new trainee solicitors at the Law Centre Network.
- One source is through LCN and the Propel scheme as we discussed earlier. We hope to share insights and learning from this collaboration.
- The second funding source is from the MOJ through our HLPAS contract. Despite the challenges in recruiting social welfare lawyers, the MOJ has recognized this difficulty, providing a grant covering half the salary for trainees. We are committed to continuing even with 50% of the needed funding and supporting the development of trainee solicitors.

7. London Legal Support Trust: AOB

- This was the final Forum session of the year. Thanks all for joining and contributing. A copy of the recording and full minutes will be sent around.
- Previous meeting notes and dates for 2024 can be found here
- We are open to volunteers for the rolling chair or forum steering group. Please contact sundus@llst.org.uk if you are interested.