

Standing up for kids  
**JUST FOR KIDS**



# Impact and Learning Report 2019

**Children & Young People Now**  
Awards 2019

**Highly Commended**

# COMPASSION

WE UNDERSTAND THE DIFFICULTIES THAT  
PEOPLE FACE AND ALWAYS ACT WITH  
EMPATHY



# Vision, Mission and Values

## OUR VISION

For all children and young people in the UK to have their legal rights and entitlements respected and promoted and their voices heard and valued.

## OUR MISSION

We exist to work with and for children and young people to hold those with power to account and fight for wider reform.

We do this by providing individual legal representation and advice as well as direct advocacy and youth support; and through strategic litigation, campaigning and equipping others to work for children's rights.

## OUR VALUES

We act with integrity, compassion, respect and courage. We put these values into practice in our relationships with the children and young people we work with, our colleagues and our partner organisations. This means:

- **Integrity:** we strive to make Just for Kids Law's vision a reality and we hold ourselves to the highest possible standards;
- **Compassion:** we understand the difficulties that people face and always act with empathy;
- **Respect:** we treat everyone with the same care, professionalism and understanding regardless of their story, experiences or background;
- **Courage:** we stand up for what is right, even in the face of opposition or adversity.

# Why We Exist

**There are many ways that a child or young person can find themselves in trouble and not know where to turn. They might be excluded from school, facing homelessness, caught up in the bureaucracy of the care system or facing criminal charges having been exploited by drug gangs. They end up navigating a world where it feels as though nobody wants to listen to them or allow them to be heard. They desperately need somebody to work with and for them to stand up for their rights and hold those with power to account. That's what we do at Just for Kids Law.**

Since we were founded in 2006, we have developed a unique model of casework. Our model is holistic, both in the way that it provides support for multiple areas of need that a young person may have, and in the way that children and young people are supported by a team of youth advocates, lawyers and youth opportunities workers who are co-located to provide a joined-up package of help. We take evidence from this casework to fight for wider

reform, bringing the voices of young people to the fore, challenging the government in the courts and lobbying in Westminster and Whitehall with a clear focus on children's rights.

Official data shows there are increasing numbers of young people in and on the edge of the care system, being excluded from education, facing homelessness and being criminally exploited. Combined with rising deprivation and public services under increasing pressure, our work is more important than ever.

The following stories illustrate the unique benefits of our casework model, which empowers the children and young people we work with by ensuring their wishes and feelings are listened to when decisions are made that affect them. All names and in these stories have been changed, as well as other identifying details, to protect the anonymity of the young people involved.

# Alyssa

## *A young mother struggling for her rights in the care system.*

Alyssa approached social services when her relationship with her mother broke down. As she was under 18, Alyssa and her then three-month old daughter Noemi were placed in foster care. However, the foster carer proved incapable of providing a safe living environment and after a few months, social services rehoused them in a council-owned hostel. Realising that the hostel was not an appropriate place for a small child, Alyssa moved in with her older cousin, her social worker having assured her that this would not affect her care leaver status once she turned 18. Despite this, once Alyssa turned 18, she was told by social services that she had not spent enough time in care to be eligible for leaving care support. Alyssa found herself facing large rent and council tax arrears and sought help from us.

Alyssa was put in touch with a youth advocate, who attended meetings with her and the housing department to help find a solution to her debt problems. Alyssa's youth advocate also connected her with our legal team, who lodged a retrospective care case to enable her to access leaving care support. Meanwhile, Alyssa's youth advocate linked her in with one of our youth opportunities workers to help her find a job to move towards financial independence. With the support of her youth advocate, Alyssa was successful in having her council tax arrears written off and securing a more affordable rent repayment plan. Her retrospective care case was also successful, giving her access to a personal advisor and discounts on rent and council tax, while, with the help of her youth opportunities worker, she successfully applied for a job in customer service. Once Alyssa's situation stabilised, her youth advocate invited her to get involved in one of our participation projects, which Alyssa found to be an empowering experience.

# Declan

*An aspiring pilot whose mistake almost put him in prison.*

Declan had dreamed of being a pilot, but his dreams were shattered when he required surgery for a serious health condition. In the severe depression that resulted from this, Declan tried to rebuild his confidence by selling small quantities of cannabis to gain the approval of his peers. Upon finding the drugs in his room, Declan's father contacted the police, who decided to press charges against him – something his father had not expected. After Declan's initial police questioning, both he and his father made admissions to Declan's then solicitor explaining the mitigating factors, but the solicitor did not push the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to consider dropping the charges, meaning that Declan was facing the possibility of a prison sentence.

His father contacted our Youth Justice Advice Line, and our solicitors made representations to the CPS explaining Declan's situation and pointing to the relevant guidance that suggested he should receive an out-of-court disposal rather than proceeding to trial. After many emails and calls to various CPS lawyers and a supportive youth offending team officer, the CPS finally agreed to drop Declan's case the day before he was due to enter his plea in court.

# Amber

*A pupil who was denied an education because of her religious beliefs.*

Amber was given a Saturday detention at her school for minor misbehaviour in class. However, Amber was not able to attend school on Saturday due to her religious beliefs. Rather than rescheduling, the school chose to punish her for her failure to attend the detention by putting her in isolation for 5 weeks solid – effectively giving her an informal internal exclusion.

Amber was only able to continue with her schooling when we took on the case and began to issue legal action on her behalf on the grounds of faith-based discrimination. The school eventually conceded, reinstating Amber in school, issuing her with a written apology, and offering her compensation for missed schooling. The school also committed to train all staff on equality duties and change their policies to prevent isolation being used like this in future. Amber has since been doing well at school and has had no further problems.

# Nathan

## *A victim of child criminal exploitation.*

Nathan is severely physically disabled and has learning difficulties. He was arrested in a stairwell of a block of flats in possession of a knife and a quantity of Class A drugs packaged for distribution. Nathan was charged with possession of an offensive weapon in a public place and possession with intent to supply Class A drugs. Our criminal solicitor took on the case.

At Nathan's first appearance before court, his social worker raised serious concerns that Nathan had been criminally exploited into committing the offences, prompting our lawyer to raise the defence under Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act. With our lawyer's assistance, Nathan's social worker subsequently filed a referral to the National Referral Mechanism for modern slavery victims – a process he had previously been unaware of. We ensured that Nathan was assessed by a clinical psychologist who, as well as diagnosing Nathan with depression and untreated ADHD, found him to be in the 95th percentile for compliance, making him particularly susceptible to exploitation.

We submitted the evidence to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) arguing that a combination of this susceptibility and the social exclusion Nathan has been targeted with throughout his life as a result of his disabilities contributed to him falling victim to child criminal exploitation. After receiving our submission, the CPS dropped all charges against Nathan on the basis that it was not in the public interest to prosecute him.



# Kareem

## *A young man trying to escape his past.*

As a young teen, Kareem was pressured into getting involved with gangs in his hometown. Finding it difficult to escape from this situation due to threats of violent reprisals against him and his family, at 17-years-old Kareem came to London, where he was street homeless, sometimes sleeping in a church. Despite this, he managed to secure himself a traineeship in construction. With the support of one of our youth advocates, Kareem presented himself as homeless to a London borough council and they agreed to support him. However, the Friday before he turned 18, the council told Kareem they would evict him as soon as he became an adult. His advocate had to move very fast to find him a solicitor who specialised in housing and community care. Thanks to the timely legal intervention, the council agreed to continue housing Kareem.

Kareem still faced financial problems. As he had turned 18, he was now eligible for Universal Credit, which his advocate encouraged him to apply for – but the six-week wait for the first payment meant he was struggling to make ends meet. We provided Kareem with supermarket vouchers from our hardship fund so he could afford essentials while waiting for his benefits to come through, which coupled with financial support from other charities enabled him to stay in his positive situation.

All seemed to be going well for Kareem until he received a letter from the housing officer informing him that he would be moved to temporary accommodation in another part of the country, which would have made it impossible for him to continue with his traineeship. With the support of Kareem's solicitor, his youth advocate informed the council of their legal obligations to Kareem and the consequences of moving him out of London. The council agreed to back down on the decision and instead seek temporary accommodation for Kareem in the borough until supported accommodation became available. In the meantime, he was allowed to remain in his current placement.

# Impact and Learning

**2019 was a really good year for us, marked by considerable achievements, including being highly commended in the charity of the year category at the Children and Young People Now magazine annual awards ceremony. At the same time, we openly embraced the challenges we face to improve the organisation.**

Let's focus on some of our achievements first. We began the year with a landmark judgement in the UK Supreme Court on criminal records. The court ruled that the disclosure of youth reprimands and cautions is disproportionate and damaging to the future rehabilitation of children, preventing them from moving on from their past. We are now calling on the government to bring forward legislation to change the law.

Later in the autumn our Let us Learn project spun out from Just for Kids Law to become an independent charity and the first ever UK charity led by young migrants. We Belong was created as a result of the determination and resilience of its impressive founders and all the young migrants involved, as well as the youth participatory ethos that is central to our work. We are very proud to have contributed to this.

School exclusion has been a prominent issue with lots of debate about the link with knife crime. We have provided legal representation to excluded children across London for many years and have now expanded this work beyond the capital for the first time, piloting legal clinics in the West Midlands and Greater Manchester thanks to pro bono support from Fieldfisher. Simultaneously, we launched an innovative new online resource that aims to increase the provision of advice and representation for excluded children by providing other organisations with all they need to assist children going through the exclusion process.

On the income generation front we also had a strong 12 months meeting our fundraising targets. This enabled us to end our financial year with a healthy surplus increasing our unrestricted reserves to more than 20% of our turnover, as was our ambition.

The backbone of our work – our casework with children and young people facing multiple problems – also progressed well with us working with over 1,000 young people, mainly across London, providing in depth support and one-off advice. As well as providing an insight into this casework, this report also provides a snapshot of what we've achieved fighting for policy and practice reform. A

more detailed overview is available in our annual report and accounts at [justforkidslaw.org/sites/default/files/fields/download/JfKL%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Financial%20Statements%202018-19.pdf](https://justforkidslaw.org/sites/default/files/fields/download/JfKL%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Financial%20Statements%202018-19.pdf)

However, we don't want to only tell you about our achievements and successes. For the first time we are calling this an 'impact and learning' report to demonstrate that for us impact is also about listening to the young people we work with, our staff and partners, reflecting and learning and always striving to improve.

In this report, we have set out what we didn't achieve and, critically as a result, what we learned. No organisation is perfect, but we believe it is important to be transparent and open about the challenges we have faced and where we think we can do better. Our plans for 2020 are very much informed by this which is why we are committed to being better at ensuring the wellbeing of our staff and improving our outcomes data and our youth participation and engagement work.

Everything we do and achieve is due to the hard work of lots of people. Our staff, volunteers, trustees, funders, supporters, partners and collaborators. We exist because of them and are hugely grateful for all that we do together.

We hope this report shows you that it's been a year of significant achievement and learning. Although not surprisingly, there is much more to do. Our cause is not a popular one – the children and young people we work with, and for, are often seen as troublesome rather than troubled. We need all the support we can get. If you don't know us and want to be one of our partners or supporters, then please do get in touch.

**Enver Solomon, CEO and  
Carolyn Regan, Chair of Trustees**



**Enver Solomon,**  
**CEO**



**Carolyn Regan,**  
**Chair of Trustees**

# Our Data



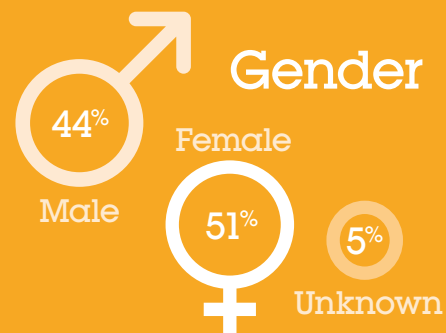
**1,032**  
Children and young people

We worked with **1,032 children and young people**, mainly in **31 London boroughs**, through our casework providing youth advocacy, legal advice and representation and youth opportunities support.

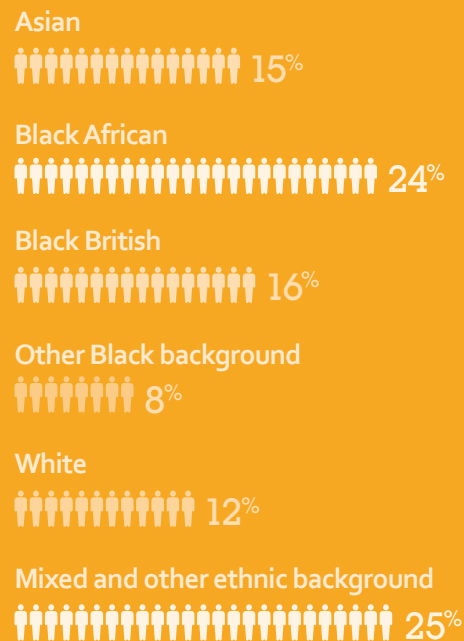
We supported these young people to address a range of needs, relating to **housing, social care, education, immigration and criminal justice issues**, working on **1,390 individual cases**. Nearly a third of these were one off advice.



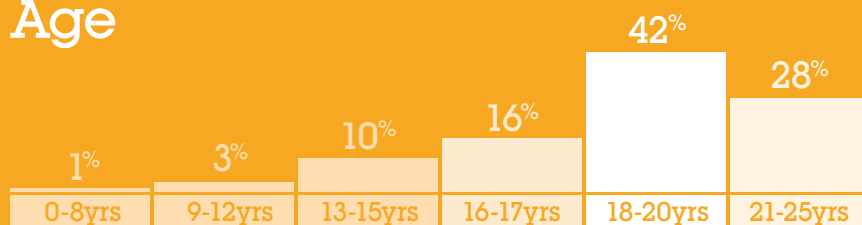
**1,390**  
Individual cases\*



### Ethnicity



### Age



How many of the young people who approached us did we work with?\*



\* Note that each young person we work with may have more than one case relating to different needs they have.

# The Difference We Make

## OUR CLIENT SURVEY

**75%** of young people reported that, since they've been supported by us:



Their situation has improved.



They feel more confident facing problems.



They know more about their rights.

These results are different from the satisfaction rates we have previously reported. Prior to this year, our annual client satisfaction survey showed satisfaction rates of over 90% - however this was based on a relatively small sample of up to 90 respondents who were selected for telephone interviews by the lawyers and youth advocates working with them. We have replaced this with an SMS survey sent to all young people after we have been working with them for four months. More than a third (36%) respond. This provides what we think is more transparent, robust and accurate data on the impact of our casework.

## OUR INDEPENDENT EVALUATION



3 out of 4 young people reported **positive change in their wellbeing** after contacting us.



9 out of 10 young people reported **feeling less alone when dealing with their problems** after contacting us.



3 out of 4 young people reported **feeling more able to speak up and express their wishes** after contacting us.

In February, we published an independent evaluation of our casework model, produced by NCVO Charities Evaluation Services. Based on in-depth interviews with 16 young people and data from a client satisfaction survey completed by 32 young people, the evaluation found “**strong evidence**” of a number of positive outcomes for young people, including feeling supported, having consistency of support, reduced feeling of isolation and improved wellbeing. The evaluation concluded that our casework model “**allowed young people to feel supported in a way they had not felt supported before by other agencies and organisations**” and that young people “**described the effect as lasting**”.



# Supporting Young People

**Strategic Aim:** Secure outcomes for individual children and young people

## Refining our model of advocacy

Since we appointed our first youth advocate in 2008, independent youth advocacy has been at the heart of our model of support. Our youth advocates work with and for children and young people to make sure that their wishes and feelings are listened to when decisions are made about them; to assist them with accessing legal and other support; and to help them understand and use their rights. In 2019, we conducted a thorough review of our advocacy model, drawing on the independent evaluation of our casework conducted by the NCVO Charities Evaluation Services and a series of in-depth focus groups with our youth advocates. The result was greater clarity on our model and improved systems for supporting our youth advocates to deliver the best possible service. We also secured funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and Clifford Chance law firm to employ two trainee youth advocates starting in January 2020. Informed by the learning from our Advocacy Year programme we are recruiting trainee advocates from a more diverse background and providing professional accreditation for trainees, who will complete a Level 3 qualification in Advocacy over their eighteen-month contract.

## Expanding our work with children excluded from school

School exclusion has long been an endemic issue among the young people we work with and the situation is not improving with the number of exclusions on the rise. The process for challenging unfair exclusions is complex, but support for excluded children and their families is hard to come by. There is an advice desert across much of the country and no legal aid is available for these cases. As well as continuing to represent excluded children across London, in 2019 we took a first step to expand our service outside the capital by piloting legal clinics in Birmingham and Manchester thanks to pro bono support from lawyers at Fieldfisher. We also launched an innovative new online resource that aims to increase the provision of advice and representation for children across England through a web-based hub providing all the necessary resources for supporting a child through every stage of the school exclusion process. In the first week after its launch, the School Exclusions Hub, which is supported by the Porticus Foundation and the Persula Foundation, had over 1,200 unique visitors.

## Protecting victims of child criminal exploitation

There is now greater recognition of criminal exploitation with children and young people involved in so-called county lines drug operations. However, despite laws to protect victims of exploitation from prosecution, too many practitioners are unaware of such provisions, meaning that children continue to be needlessly criminalised, dragging them further into a current of crime from which it is difficult to escape. Since it became law in 2015, we have been at the forefront of using the Modern Slavery Act to divert exploited children from the criminal justice system. Our criminal solicitors continued to take on these cases, regularly linking up with statutory agencies to make referrals to the National Referral Mechanism for victims of modern slavery and ensuring that positive referrals were taken into account by courts and prosecutors. Through our Youth Justice Advice Line, we also provided advice to lawyers, youth offending teams, and parents of exploited children providing them up-to-date information on the full spectrum of youth justice issues, including county lines and modern slavery law.

## Upholding the rights of care leavers

Children in care are some of the most vulnerable in society, but things can get even worse for them once they turn 18 and leave the care of their local authority. All too often care leavers don't get the support they need to transition to independence and become self-sufficient adults, with shocking numbers ending up homeless and destitute. Our community care lawyers worked with a number of

care leavers to make sure they were able to access support, and where appropriate launched so called 'retrospective care cases' to compel local authorities to provide care leavers with the assistance they are entitled to. We also provided care leavers with advocacy and opportunities support, helping them to live independently, manage their finances and access employment and benefits. This included having an advocate dedicated to supporting care leavers with children, who all too often are not given the support they need to look after their children and face having them removed without being given the opportunity to prove themselves as good parents.

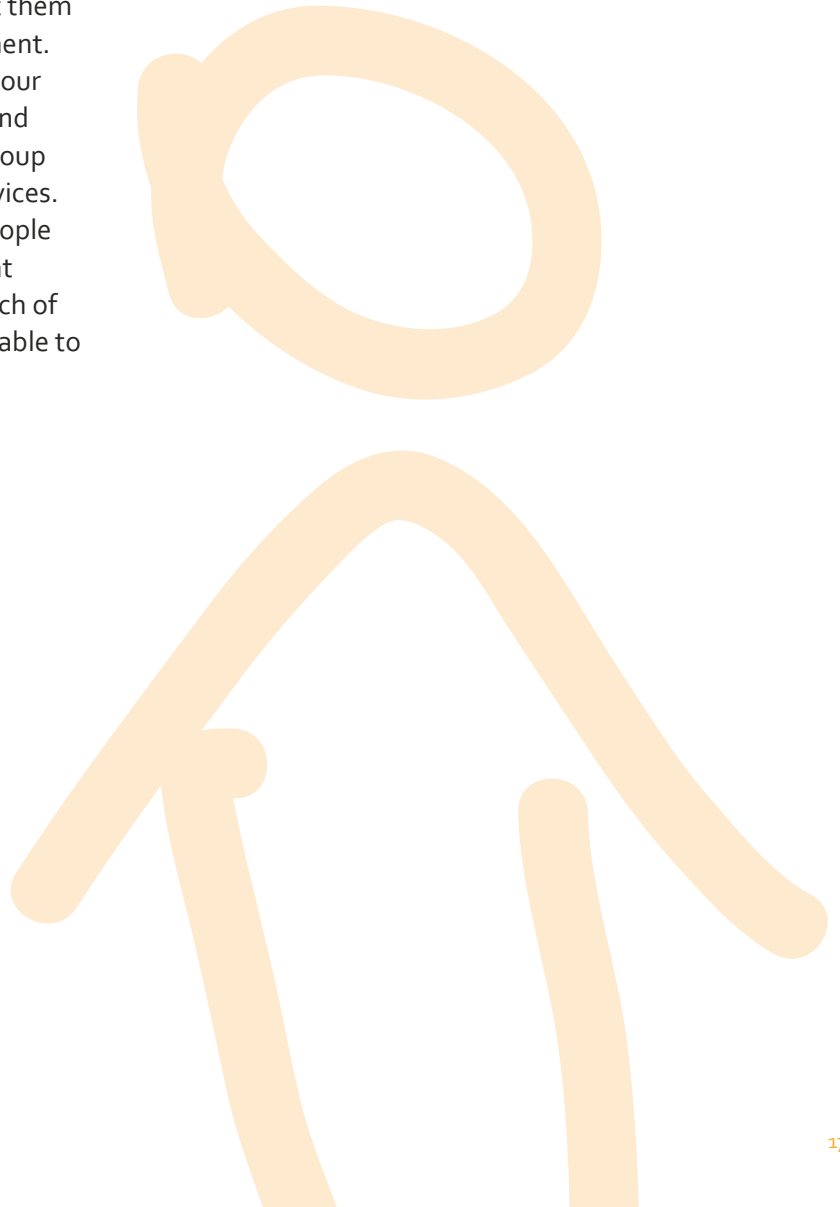
## Securing immigration status

The immigration system remains a hurdle to many children and young people seeking a secure and stable future in the UK. Young people who have lived in the UK from a young age and know no other home are forced to complete long and complex applications and hand over extortionate fees, with one misstep spelling potential disaster. We have already established an active immigration practice, funded by Trust for London, assisting non-EU citizens with leave to remain and citizenship applications, and the UK's imminent withdrawal from the EU means that we are now advising children of EU nationals on applications for settled status. Our Head of Immigration was also selected to sit on a Multi Advisory Assurance Panel to provide expertise as the Home Office seeks to reform the consideration of, and support for, victims of trafficking in the UK.



## Refocusing our youth opportunities support

Our support doesn't stop when our advocacy and legal teams have helped young people stabilise their lives. Recognising that young people in difficulty face significant barriers to personal development, we seek to remove those barriers and support them in accessing education, training and employment. In 2019, we sought to ensure that we focused our youth opportunities support on the children and young people who need it most – the same group who rely on our youth advocacy and legal services. Through providing these vulnerable young people with the help they need to access employment and education opportunities, we empower each of them to become independent, confident and able to reach their full potential.



**Let Us Learn!**

Join us for  
an exciting  
learning experience

Learn from  
the best  
educators

Connect with us  
to explore  
new opportunities

**Let Us Learn!**

Find out more:  
@LetUsLearn Find us  
Let Us Learn is part of Just for Kids  
[www.justforkids.com/ny](http://www.justforkids.com/ny)



# Putting Young People at the Centre

**Strategic Aim:** Develop an organisation in which participation is central to all our activities

## Empowering young changemakers

A key advantage of a charity that combines direct support to children and young people with campaigning for social change is that we can ensure that those most affected by issues are directly involved in the fight for positive reform. In recent years, we have brought the voices and experiences of young people to the attention of policymakers and practitioners through different projects, such as our Change it! campaign, funded by Comic Relief, focusing on children's right to housing. Members of the campaign steering group took the brave step of meeting with the Housing Minister to tell them what changes they wanted to see. In 2019 we also expanded our participation project which aims to build a group of engaged children and young people with experience of school exclusion and empower them to be part of the conversation in London about an inclusive education system. Creating a group like this requires considerable engagement work and we are only at the beginning of what we hope will be a powerful journey.

## Bringing the experiences of young people in the criminal justice system to practitioners

We believe that the experiences of the young people we work with in the criminal justice system can have a powerful impact on lawyers and other practitioners to make the case for improvements in practice. In all training sessions with solicitors and barristers on how to effectively represent children in court, we always included children and young people who shared their stories. We also brought together a group to be consulted by the Solicitors Regulation Authority as part of their consultation on standards in the criminal courts. Children and young people often tell us that they don't feel listened to in court and don't understand what happens when they are sentenced. It was therefore important for us to be involved in a collaboration with Newcastle Law School to develop recommendations for how judges and magistrates can communicate more effectively when delivering sentences affecting children and young people.

### **From *Let us Learn* to *We Belong***

2019 saw the launch of We Belong, the first UK-wide charity run entirely by and for young migrants, which aims to create a movement of ambitious and engaged young people, able to contribute fully to the country they call home. The new organisation builds on the success of our Let us Learn campaign, which was set up in 2014 to fight for young migrants to have access to student finance. We subsequently developed the talents of the project's young leaders until they were ready to take the plunge and establish their own charity. The new organisation is a testament not only to the talent, tenacity and resilience of its founders and all the young migrants involved, but also to the youth participatory ethos that is central to our work at Just for Kids Law.

### **Engaging children and young people across our work**

With support from the Oak Foundation we have increased the capacity and resource for our participation and youth engagement work. This has enabled us to start improving the quality of this work and extend the involvement of young people in projects across the organisation. As well as supporting young people to speak to policy makers and practitioners it includes improving how we listen to young people ourselves when we take organisational decisions, for example, including young people in the process of recruiting new staff.

# Fighting for Change

**Strategic Aim:** Secure changes to the legal, policy and practice environment for children and young people

## Standing up for children's rights

We host the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) and 2019 was a significant year marking the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). CRAE was set up in 1991 after the UK ratified the convention in order to monitor the government's commitment to upholding the document. We co-organised a major conference at University College London to mark the anniversary and took two young people to attend a global event at the UN. Three decades on, there have certainly been many positive changes to policy and practice to implement children's rights and we brought about some more in 2019. Our work co-chairing the UNCRC Action Group with the Department for Education resulted in a child rights impact assessment template being rolled out across Whitehall and tailored child rights training for civil servants, including sessions on children's rights being held as part of the induction process for fast stream civil servants.

Unfortunately, there still remain too many instances when children's rights are overlooked. Working within our Policy and Campaigns team CRAE leads the sector in monitoring government compliance with the UNCRC through our annual State of Children's Rights report, published in March 2019. The report included new data on rising levels of

police taser and spit-hood use against children and increasing numbers of families with children being housed in inappropriate B&B accommodation.

## Pushing back on dangerous practices

Youth justice has always been a cornerstone of our work, and we are proactive in pushing for change to how young people are treated when they interact with the criminal justice system. As well as highlighting rising police use of tasers and spit-hoods in our State of Children's Rights report, we collaborated with partners to campaign against government plans for Knife Crime Prevention Orders, with our commentary on the plans featuring in the national press. We also challenged the government not to take away the rights of vulnerable EU children in trouble with the law. Drawing on evidence from our casework we began a project, supported by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, on the consequences for young people who turn 18 during the criminal justice process undertaking research and consulting with young people as well as experts and practitioners across the sector. The Law Society has now recognised the need for reform to ensure children turning 18 are dealt with promptly, and the Guardian published an article focusing on the issue as part of its series on youth justice.

## Changing the law on criminal records

As well as monitoring government activity and campaigning for reform, we take our fight for children's rights directly to public bodies through strategic legal challenges which we hope will bring about wider changes in policy. Our strategic litigation team secured a landmark Supreme Court judgment on the disclosure of youth reprimands and cautions that are supposed to divert children away from the criminal justice system when they are accused of minor crimes. Under the current regime, however, some reprimands and cautions can appear on police checks for decades after they were issued. The Supreme Court ruled that this system is disproportionate and damaging to the future rehabilitation of children, preventing them from moving on from their past. Since the ruling, we have continued to monitor the situation and push the government to implement the judgment through a change to the law, as well as calling on the government to conduct a root and branch review of the criminal records systems for children and young people to ensure criminal records do not blight their lives indefinitely.

## Raising standards in the youth justice system

Since 2014, our Youth Justice Legal Centre has been improving standards among professionals in the youth justice sector through specialist trainings and a dedicated website on youth justice law with an average of over 13,000 monthly visitors. In 2019 we held our third Youth Justice Summit hosted by the Dickson Poon School of Law at King's College London. It brought together 250

youth justice professionals to hear from expert speakers, share best practice and discuss issues of vital importance to young people who get caught up in the criminal justice system. Speakers included leading figures from the legal sector such as the then Law Commissioner David Ormerod QC, as well as experts in adolescent psychology and brain development Sarah-Jayne Blakemore and Simon Baron-Cohen. Attendees told us that the event gave them invaluable information that would improve their approach to representing vulnerable young clients in the criminal justice system.

## Making a splash

Just for Kids Law has long been a charity that punches well above its weight in terms of press coverage and exposure of the issues we are fighting to reform, and we managed to do even better in 2019. Over the course of the year, we were mentioned 68 times in national and international newspapers and news websites, 60 times in sector and specialist publications, and 23 times in local newspapers, as well as appearing 18 times on national and local TV and radio. We also increased our social media reach, finishing the year with over 8,500 followers on Twitter, with our tweets achieving over a million impressions. We also took a tentative step into the podcast world by launching a one-off pilot about the story of a young person struggling to stand up for their rights. Listeners met Mayowa a young man from south London who with our help fought to resolve his immigration status.

# Panel Discussion: Children, neurodevelopmental issues and the criminal courts

*Prof. Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, Prof. Simon Baron-Cohen, Brenda Campbell QC and Maya Sikand*

*Chair: Shauneen Lambe*

Live-tweet: @YJLCUK #YJSummit19

**YJLC**  
Youth Justice Legal Centre



# Creating a Strong Organisation

**Strategic Aim:** Maintain and develop a robust organisation using our strengths to maximum impact

## Investing in our people

We couldn't provide the vital help that children and young people need without the lawyers, youth advocates, youth opportunities and participation workers, policy experts and support staff that make up our incredible team of nearly 40 staff. In February, we conducted a new staff survey to find out the team's key concerns. While staff overwhelmingly reported being proud to work at Just for Kids Law and listed positive benefits including generous annual leave and flexible working policies, there were areas for improvement, with the biggest concern being around salaries. We responded with a salary review and a new remuneration policy, overall increasing salaries and pay bands to ensure we can recruit and retain high quality staff with the ability to maximise our impact. Another concern raised by staff has been the impact on their wellbeing due to working with vulnerable children and young people that have experienced great trauma in their lives. To address this, we successfully applied for funding from the City Bridge Trust Responding to the Resilience Risk programme for training and support for all frontline staff, equipping them with understanding how trauma can impact on their own emotional wellbeing, and providing reflective practice for all staff working directly with young people.

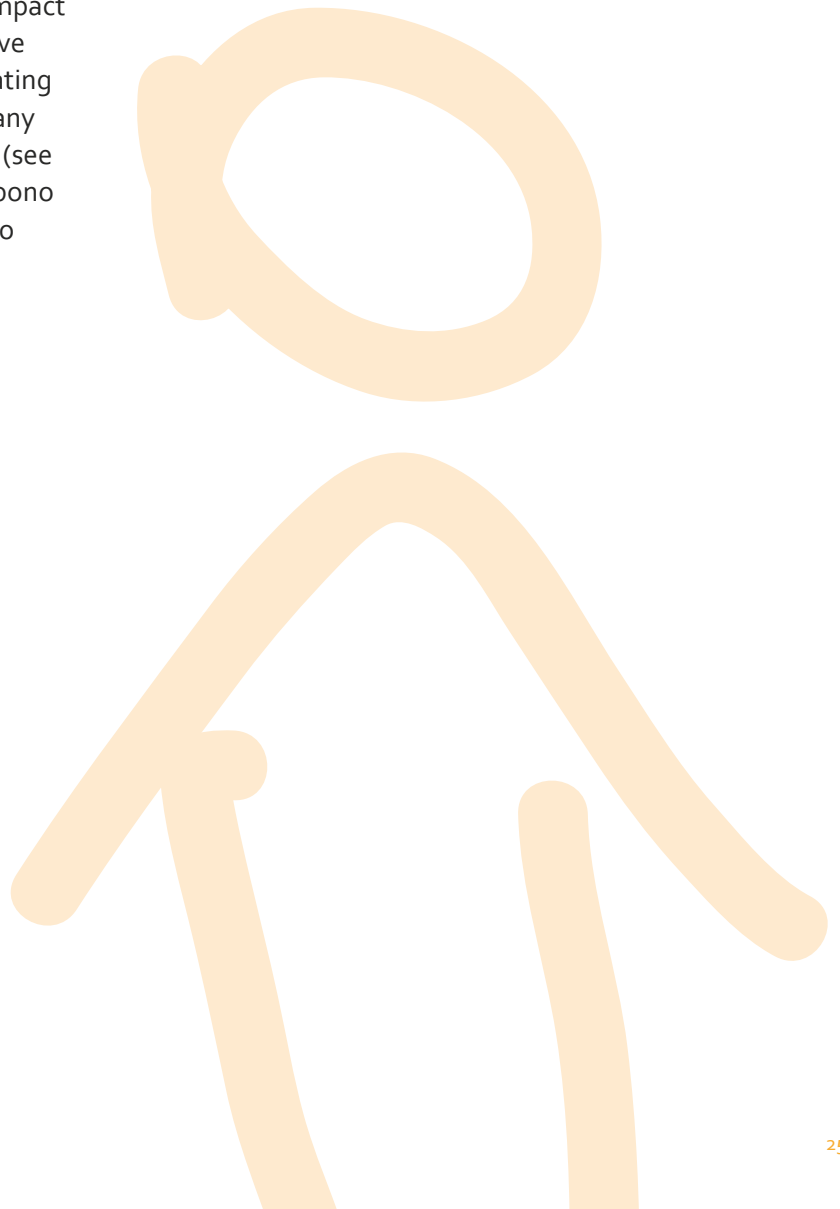
## Building a joined-up team

Just for Kids Law has grown significantly in recent years. In 2015, we merged with the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), expanding our policy and influencing work. In the same year, we launched the Youth Justice Legal Centre (YJLC) to provide accurate information and training on youth justice law. This has diversified our work and enabled us to fight for reform and improve practice across a wider canvas, however, such expansions can also lead to silos developing and organisations becoming disjointed and inefficient. We ensured that this wouldn't happen by restructuring our team and creating a unified Policy and Campaigns directorate, incorporating CRAE and YJLC as well as policy and practice reform work on school exclusions, housing and care leavers. This ensures that we make the most of the resources we have available, and don't miss any opportunities to work together or spot emergent challenges affecting the children and young people we work with.



## Getting the right data

We are committed to continuous improvement and to providing the best possible service to children and young people in difficulty. We know that to do this we need robust and accurate data that gives a clear, honest and transparent picture of the number of young people we are supporting, and the impact we are having on their lives. That's why we have worked on improving our data gathering, creating a new SMS survey to get feedback from as many of the young people we work with as possible (see the results on page 12) and working with pro bono support from the Boston Consultancy Group to create a new set of outcome metrics.



# Learning Matters to Us

We have achieved a great deal, but we didn't manage to realise all of our objectives. Specific occurrences made us stop and think about lessons we need to learn and what we need to do differently. Learning is paramount to us because it ensures we are always seeking to improve our work with and for children and young people

Key things we didn't achieve last year:

- We want to be able to show the real difference we achieve through our casework with children and young people by collecting outcome data. This has proved more difficult to put in place than we anticipated. We realised that we needed to make sure we collect information on all our casework and then pilot collecting data on a new set of outcomes indicators. We are still working on this and hope to report outcomes next year.
- We put in place a new employment contract and core suite of HR policies but there are a number of important policies we have yet to review and improve. These include our serious incident

policy, our equality and diversity policy, a new staff wellbeing policy and a new volunteering policy.

- We didn't make as much progress as we wanted to achieve wider policy and practice reform for young people across the priority areas we have identified – school exclusions, youth justice and housing support. This was because we found ourselves having to react to damaging government reforms. These included fighting government proposals which could result in children of EU Nationals in trouble with the law losing rights they currently have and the introduction of Knife Crime Protection Orders that unnecessarily criminalise children.
- Even though we raised more money than ever before, we were not successful in getting sufficient funding to commence plans to pilot the implementation of our casework model outside London. This is a goal we set we set in our three-year strategic plan that we are not expecting to achieve. Because of this, we have decided to review this ambitious goal and consider if it is the right goal for the organisation at this time in our development. We are also very mindful of the

fact that we do not currently have capacity to support all the young people in the capital who need our help.

By not achieving all we hoped to and by taking stock of other important things that we were not expecting to happen we have learned a lot:

- **Staff wellbeing and resilience is incredibly important:** We had higher than expected staff turnover in our youth advocacy team which made us take stock and consider if we are putting in place the right support for our frontline staff to enable them to be sufficiently resilient. We learned that we had not necessarily got the balance right between being focused on our beneficiaries and being focused on the needs of staff. We recognised that we need to do much more to put in place support for all our frontline staff and to also think about how we support the wellbeing of the whole staff team. For us, this included recognising the importance of making sure our office environment is fit for purpose.
- **Clarifying our core focus:** Implementing changes to how we organise ourselves to deliver our policy and practice reform work made us ask ourselves if we are sufficiently clear about our core purpose. In other words, what would we do if our resources were limited and we had to scale back our work? We were clear that youth justice is a core issue for us that we will always seek to fight for reform as well as maintaining our casework as well as continuing the work of the Children's Rights Alliance for England.

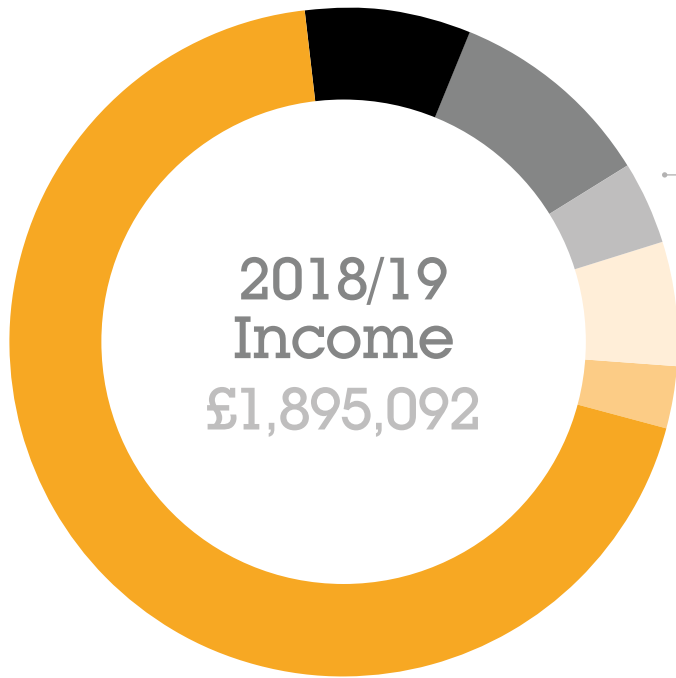
- **Our systems and processes need to be improved further:** We are not complacent about the fact that we don't have all the right policies in place. We have learned that we need to be open about this with ourselves. We don't, for example, have the type of lone working policy in place that we want to have. And we don't have the type of equality and diversity policy in place that we want to have. We know this and are working hard to address it.
- **We are on an impact journey:** Our work with young people is not simple and neat. We do not work on one issue providing a straightforward input that leads to an easily identifiable output. Establishing a set of genuine outcomes has not been easy. Working out how best to capture them has also been more difficult than we expected. We have learned that demonstrating our impact is far more complicated than we anticipated not least because it requires us to change how we record data and adopt a different mindset.
- **London and beyond:** We are not convinced that now is the time for us to be thinking about trying to implement the entirety of our casework model in another city. Given the range of organisational needs we are addressing we think it is probably too ambitious for now. This doesn't mean there aren't other ways we can work with young people outside the capital who need our support as our legal clinic on school exclusions is proving to us. However, we need to give this more detailed thought when we produce our next three-year strategy.

# Looking to the Future

## **In 2020, we will build on our achievements and learning to take forward some specific objectives and plans:**

- We will complete a review of our participation and youth engagement work, so we have a clearer understanding of our approach and how we want to embed it across the organisation.
- Our legal team will aim to increase to its capacity by employing a specialist housing solicitor, gaining funding to take on an additional immigration caseworker and implementing the learning from the legal clinic pilot on school exclusion casework to consider future expansion.
- We will ensure the wellbeing of our staff is paramount, implementing a new policy and action plan as well as putting in place a comprehensive package of support, including reflective practice, clinical supervision and regular training for all our frontline staff. This will build their resilience and ensure they are equipped to do the best job possible with the children and young people we support.
- We will further develop campaigning work to highlight the lack of social care and housing support for older teenagers and young people, including care leavers, taking the evidence from our casework to improve policy and practice.
- We will pilot and implement new outcome indicators that demonstrate the real difference we make to the young people we support and review our new SMS survey that we send to all young people we work with. We will also start to better capture the impact we make in our work to secure legal, policy and practice reforms for children and young people.
- We will move to a new office so that we have a working environment for our staff that meets their needs and is fit for purpose.

# Our funds



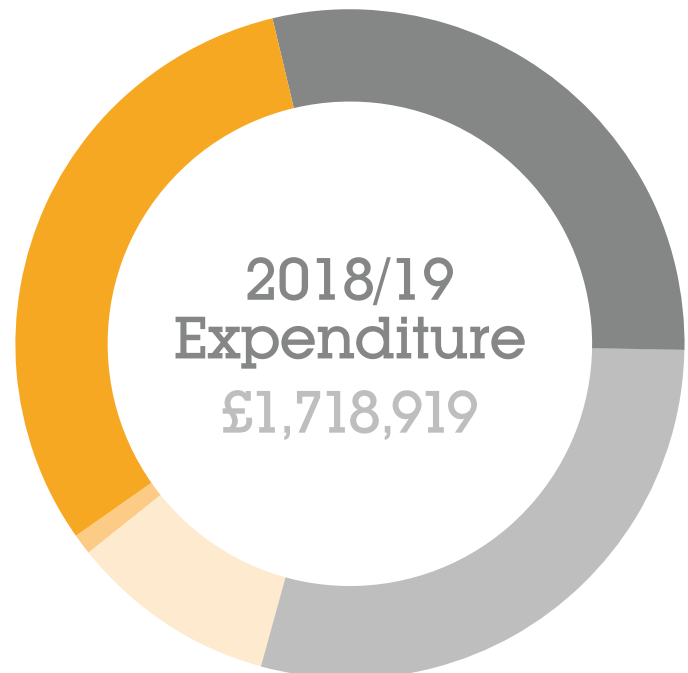
## INCOME BREAKDOWN

● Trains and Foundations	£1,309,087
● Donations	£180,276
● National Lottery Community Fund	£156,104
● Corporates	£71,721
● Legal	£112,702
● Training and other income	£65,202

A list of funders can be found on our website at:  
[justforkidslaw.org/about-us/our-funders](http://justforkidslaw.org/about-us/our-funders)

## EXPENDITURE BREAKDOWN

● Central	£504,501
● Legal	£501,805
● Programmes and participation <i>(including youth advocacy and youth opportunities)</i>	£513,390
● Policy and campaigns	£177,540
● Fundraising costs	£21,683



These summary financial figures have been extracted from the full Annual Report and Accounts which were approved by the Board of Trustees on 5th December 2019. However, these summary figures have not been separately audited.



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