

Standing up for kids

JUST FOR KIDS



Impact Report 2018



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Our Vision

Just for Kids Law's vision is 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 legal representation and advice, direct advocacy and support, and through strategic litigation, campaigning and equipping others to work for children's rights.

Introduction

Twelve years after Just for Kids Law was established, 2018 was a significant year in many different ways. We appointed our first full time CEO, the final post in a reorganised leadership team, completed the first year operating our own independent legal services and invested in our infrastructure by upgrading our IT, expanding our office space and implementing a new casework database. We also published a new three-year strategy, including a revised mission and vision, providing a more focused future direction of travel.

A key achievement over the last year has been our work to improve how we demonstrate the impact of our holistic model of help for more than a thousand young people across London combining youth advocacy, support and development opportunities with legal advice and representation. Our new client database has enabled us to capture more robust information about who we work with. The first ever independent evaluation of our casework model was completed and found 'strong evidence' of a number of positive benefits for young people including less isolation, improved wellbeing and an increased understanding of their rights. We are now taking the learning from this evaluation and from an internal review of how we measure our impact to develop a set of outcome measures that tell a more accurate story of the difference we make to young people.

Our new three-year strategy emphasises that one of our key strengths is how we take the evidence from our practice to fight for wider reform. Our young migrants-led Let Us Learn campaign has continued to challenge the government's 'hostile environment' policy and won the Sheila McKechnie Foundation National Campaigners Award. Through the Change it! project led by the Children's Rights Alliance for England, which is the policy arm of Just for Kids Law, we have also supported young people to speak out on

homelessness, publishing a powerful report, 'It feels like being in prison' about their experiences living in bed & breakfast and hostel accommodation; our Youth Justice Legal Centre project has been at the forefront of campaigning for better quality legal representation for children establishing a new Ministry of Justice working group; and we continue to be one of the few young people's charities working on high profile strategic litigation cases, challenging the government in the Supreme Court on the retention and disclosure of criminal records. The success of our work was recognised when we were named Organisation of the Year at the Howard League for Penal Reform Community Awards.

With official data showing there are more young people in and on the edge of the care system, more being excluded from education, more facing homelessness and more being criminally exploited, the need for our work is greater than ever. Giving these young people a voice in national and local decision making will be a priority for us over the next year as we work even harder to ensure their legal rights and entitlements are respected and promoted.

We are very grateful to all the organisations and individuals who work with us as funders, supporters, partners and collaborators.

Enver Solomon
Chief Executive
Officer



Carolyn Regan
Chair of the Board
of Trustees



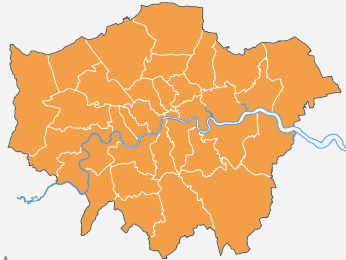
Who we work with

We worked with

1,060

children and young people, mainly across

31 London boroughs, through our direct casework providing youth advocacy, legal advice and representation and youth opportunities support.



We supported these young people to address a range of needs, including:

Housing



Social Care



Education



Immigration



Criminal Justice



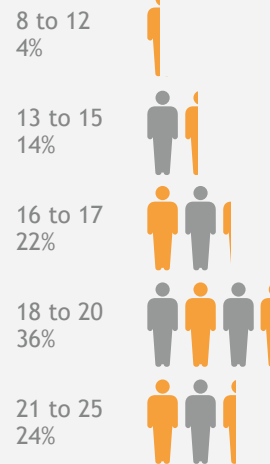
working on **1,350** individual cases.

How do they find us?

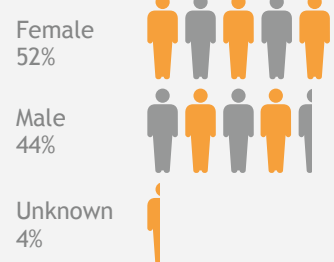


Who are the children and young people we work with?

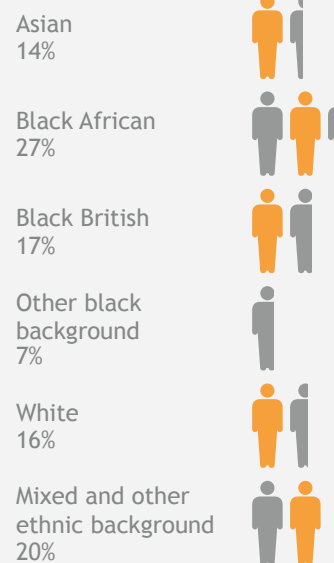
Age



Gender



Ethnicity



Who we work with

How many of the young people who approach us do we work with?

Case taken on
73%*



One-off advice provided
15%*



Signposted - no capacity
13%*



*Percentage of young people who approach us whose case falls within our scope.

Improving the quality of our data

We have reviewed the quality of the data we collect about our work with children and young people and introduced a new database. Through this process we established that the data presented in previous impact reports was not as accurate and robust as we thought. Compared to the data in this report there are therefore significant differences. We are now confident we are capturing better-quality data. With pro bono support from Boston Consultancy Group we are developing a new set of outcomes data for next year.

What issues do we help them with?



30%

Education, training & employment



29%

Social care, housing & finance



24%

Criminal Justice



17%

Immigration

The difference we make

Our client survey

Each year we conduct a client survey, interviewing around 10% of the young people we work with to ask them about their experience of working with Just for Kids Law and how their lives have been transformed as a result.

94%

of the young people we work with said we made **some or a lot of difference** to their situation.

89%

of the young people we work with said they felt **more positive about their futures** after working with us.

87%

of the young people we work with said they **knew more about their rights** after working with us.

87%

of the young people we work with are **happy or very happy** with our support.

88%

of the young people we work with **would recommend us** to a friend.

The difference we make

Independent evaluation

In 2018 the first ever independent evaluation of our direct casework model with young people was carried out by NCVO Charities Evaluation Services as part of their review of our Advocacy Year programme. Based on in depth interviews with young people, in addition to the outcomes reported in our client survey, it found 'strong evidence' of a number of positive outcomes for young people:

- feeling supported and having consistency of support
- reduced feeling of isolation
- improved wellbeing
- improved social care situation
- improved education, training and employment situations
- improved financial situation
- increased ability to self-advocate

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'.

“Having one person working with you that’s consistent, that does help. It allows you to feel a bit more secure and allows you to want the help more.”

“Before I got help... I attempted to take my own life because I couldn't access any help, I felt like I had no options. They came and helped me and showed me that I actually do.”

3 out of 4

young people reported positive change in their wellbeing after contacting us.

“My life was in other people’s hands. Just for Kids Law helped me understand that is not entirely true and that I do have rights and I can use my rights.”

9 out of 10

young people reported feeling less alone when dealing with their problems after contacting us.

Supporting young people

Just for Kids Law was founded with the vision of supporting young people in difficulty to overcome all the issues they face.

The nature of our individual casework is holistic, both in the way that it seeks to provide support covering multiple areas of need that a young person has and in the way that they are supported by a team of advocates, lawyers and youth opportunities workers who are co-located to provide a joined-up package of help.

“My advocate has become my voice.”

Award-winning co-production

In October, we were awarded the Best Co-Production prize at the National Advocacy Awards for our video 'If I Could Talk To Me'.

The film, produced with young parents in collaboration with independent filmmakers, highlights the difficulties faced by care-leavers who become young parents, and informs them of their right to independent advocacy. Since its launch in December 2017, the video has been featured in The Guardian and racked up over 7,000 views on YouTube.



To visit clients and attend meetings, our advocates travelled around **24,000** miles throughout the year.

Advocacy

Our team of youth advocates are at the heart of everything we do. They work directly with young people to make sure that their wishes and feelings are heard when decisions are made about them, as well as helping them to access legal support and other services they need to resolve the multiple challenges they face.

Over the last year our advocates have seen children and young people struggling to cope with issues that are becoming ever more serious. They have found that local authorities continue to fail in their legal duties to provide appropriate accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness, leaving them to sleep rough or stay in unsafe bed & breakfasts or hostels.

Children who should be taken into care are not being given the support they are entitled to, leaving them to struggle in unsafe situations that put them at risk of abuse and exploitation. Furthermore our advocates find that even when a child is recognised as looked after they are not always given the help they should get. Young people who have been in care and become parents themselves are not given the support they need to look after their children and face having them removed without being given the opportunity to be good parents.

“I love having a grassroots charity without having to go through many layers to contact someone who can help.”

Supporting young people



Now in its third year, our Advocacy Year programme is a graduate scheme offering those considering a career in social justice or the law the opportunity to work as a Just for Kids Law youth advocate.

Four trainee youth advocates support young people across east London while learning vital skills to prepare them for a career in the law or social justice sector.

An evaluation of the first two years found that the participants were satisfied with many aspects of the programme and that they reported 'improved communication skills, improved advocacy skills and increased clarity on their future goals'.

“As a young person you don’t really know who to contact when you have an issue. Some organisations can’t provide for all needs, but Just For Kids Law can, which was extremely helpful. I don’t know what I would do without JfKL.”

Sarah’s Story

Sarah, 16-years-old, was left homeless after her dad moved abroad and didn’t take her along. When she approached social services for help, they placed her in a hostel for adults with substance misuse issues and experience of the criminal justice system. After Sarah’s Youth Offending Team worker was unsuccessful in pushing the local authority to transfer Sarah to more suitable accommodation, they referred her to JfKL.

She was immediately connected with a youth advocate, who, after listening to Sarah’s wishes and feelings, worked to lodge another safeguarding concern and get social services to recognise her as a looked after child. When the local authority were unwilling to accommodate Sarah somewhere else, her advocate engaged a community care solicitor at JfKL to help move her case forward. Her advocate worked with Sarah and her lawyer to push the local authority to recognise her as a looked after child, which they did after the submission of a letter before action. Sarah was accommodated in supported housing and her advocate helped her to rebuild her relationship with the local authority by attending meetings with her and ensuring her wishes and feelings were part of the conversations and were accounted for in the decisions made.

Once things had stabilised for Sarah, her advocate linked her in with the youth opportunities worker at JfKL who helped her to access a college course. He also helped her make a complaint to the local authority, resulting in a review of their policies and compensation for Sarah.

This case demonstrates the advantages of our holistic model, providing youth advocacy, legal and youth opportunities support to help our client resolve her situation and take her life forward.

Supporting young people

Our legal team plays a crucial role in our work, providing direct legal representation to clients in a range of practice areas. Our clients highly value the opportunity to access legal representation as part of our holistic casework model.

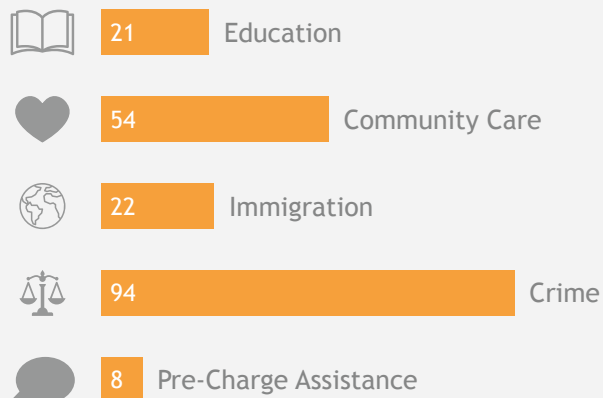
Criminal Law

Since our foundation, youth justice has been a crucial focus of JfKL's work, and our criminal law practice is a central pillar of the organisation. Our criminal solicitors do their utmost to avoid the criminalisation of children and make sure that the young person's voice is heard and valued both at the police station and – in cases where court proceedings cannot be avoided – in the courtroom. In the last year we have been leading the way in use of the Modern Slavery Act to avoid criminalisation of victims of child criminal exploitation, as well as pioneering the use of scientific evidence concerning adolescent brain development in court proceedings. In addition to providing direct representation to clients, we improve outcomes for young people by providing one-off specialist advice to lawyers, other practitioners and parents through our Youth Justice Advice Line.

Criminal records handbook

In October, we published a new handbook to highlight the inequities and contradictions of the UK criminal records system, offering clarity and insight to practitioners in navigating this topic. The handbook shines a light on the collection and keeping of records by the police, as well as the review and deletion of police records and the disclosure of records on Disclosure and Barring Service ("DBS") Certificates. Since publication, the handbook has been downloaded over 100 times and was selected for inclusion in the Youth Justice Board's Youth Justice Resources Hub.

Clients we provided with legal representation:



“Just for Kids Law laid out the law in a manner that we could understand.”

Josh's Story

Josh was arrested for selling drugs at a music festival and sentenced to 3 years in prison. Another young person from the same school and of the same age was arrested for a similar crime but received only a suspended sentence.

Josh's original solicitors appealed the sentence, but when their appeal got knocked back, they decided not to proceed with the case. JfKL then agreed to take on the case pro bono. We submitted a renewed grounds for appeal, arguing that Josh's sentence was disproportionate, and that the comparative severity of the sentence represented racial discrimination. We were successful in having Josh's sentence reduced by 8 months.

As well as demonstrating our expertise in challenging sentencing decisions, this case shows our capacity to secure positive outcomes in cases that most law firms would not be able to take on.

Supporting young people

Education and Community Care Law

Our Education and Community care team provide legal advice and representation to many vulnerable children and young people. A key element of their work over the past year has been school exclusions as we frequently represent children in challenges to permanent exclusions at both Governing Body Hearings and Independent Review Panels.

We have also experienced a lot of young people with special educational needs – some as young as five – being permanently excluded, despite it being clear that their needs are not being met and often not even recognised by the school. The team has also taken on a number of so called 'retrospective care cases' where they provide legal representation to young people who should have been taken into care when they were teenagers. By challenging councils we have been able to get many young people the support that care leavers are entitled to.



Our Legal Director, Aika Stephenson, won the prestigious Criminal Defence Lawyer of the Year award at the 2018 Legal Aid lawyer of the year awards [LALYs]. Aika is the only person ever to win two individual LALY awards - her first was Young Legal Aid Lawyer in 2007.

“Since I’ve been supported by Just for Kids Law, things are improving a lot. I know my rights and I make sure to bring them up.”

Lara’s Story

Lara was excluded for allegedly taking a knife out in school and persistent disruptive behaviour. Lara and her mother had already been through the Governing Body process before they came to JfKL and the Governing Body had upheld the permanent exclusion.

We challenged that decision to the Independent Review Panel, highlighting that the Governing Body had failed to follow the statutory guidance in coming to its decision including failing to set out in detail the reason for its decision. This included the fact that Lara was from an African-Caribbean background and received free school meals, placing her at higher risk of exclusion, and that she had special educational needs that impacted her behaviour if she was not provided with the correct support.

The Panel quashed the decision of the Governing Body and directed that it should reconsider it. On reconsideration the Governing Body decided to reinstate Lara in education.

This case demonstrates our expertise in school exclusions – a vital component of our work, especially as exclusions are often a crucial factor in leading young people into the criminal justice system.

Supporting young people

Immigration Law

Our immigration caseworker supports young people on a range of complex issues relating to their legal status. Despite the Windrush scandal and the media focus on the government's 'Hostile Environment' immigration policy, the situation facing the young people without permanent residency status we work with remains as hostile as ever. Arcane and often punitive rules combined with high fees for Home Office applications mean they face serious hardship. As well as fighting to get the most secure status possible for young people, we have been successful in securing fee waivers, time extensions and other conditions that allow them to remain and contribute to British society.



Our Senior Immigration Supervisor, Charlotte Buckley, helps children and young people like Mayowa (pictured), many with highly complex cases, to achieve immigration status. Mayowa received Limited Leave to Remain after waiting for almost a year for the Home Office to respond to his application.

“Just for Kids Law has given me direction and helped me to understand what was happening and why. They helped me get clarity and figure out the next steps.”

Damien's Story

Damien received a Deportation Notice from the Home Office while serving an 8-month prison sentence. Our immigration solicitor and Damien's youth advocate visited him in prison, where Damien made them aware that he suffers from mental health problems and did not feel that he was receiving adequate care from the healthcare department in prison. We submitted representations to the Home Office confirming the reason why Damien should not be subject to a Deportation Order, asking for a time extension in order to obtain medical evidence in relation to his mental health. The Home Office decided not to proceed with deportation subsequent to the representations. Our immigration solicitor worked collaboratively with the Education and Community Care team to ensure that social services exercised their duty of care to Damien, who is a care leaver, as well as working with the Crime team to ensure that safeguarding issues in prison were adequately addressed and that Damien's healthcare needs are being catered for.

This is yet another case that demonstrates the advantages of our combination of expertise in various legal practice areas alongside strong independent youth advocacy.

Supporting young people



The young-migrant-led Let us Learn project was set up in 2014 to fight for the rights of young UK migrants who are denied access to education due to their residency status and provide them with advice

and support. 2018 was a busy year for the group, building a movement of young activists through 11 gatherings and its first ever youth summit, as well as 20 visits to schools and colleges. We also worked to empower a new generation of young leaders through two leadership programmes. The project has broadened from its focus on education to fighting for the rights of young migrants across the board, campaigning this year on the impact of rising Home Office fees, culminating in the launch of a new campaign video and two actions, one in front of Downing Street and the other at the Home Office. As the Windrush scandal broke, the young activists in the group spoke out in the media against the government's 'hostile environment' policy, while they also promoted the campaign's message through 20 meetings with MPs and peers. Our young activists' efforts were rewarded with the Amplifying Voices Award from the Sheila McKechnie Foundation.

In 2018, Let us Learn organised:



11 Gatherings



20 Meetings with MPs and Peers



20 School visits



2 Leadership programmes with 22 graduates



“My youth opportunities worker helped me write the application, and we sat down and went over the personal statement. I got accepted, which has changed things so much after waiting four years to go to university.”

Youth Opportunities

A crucial component of our holistic model is that 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. This empowers each young person to become independent, confident and able to reach their full potential.

Our youth opportunities workers supported

150 

young people to access education, training and employment opportunities.

Working for change

It is not just the children and young people we work with directly who benefit from the impact of our work: we fight for wider change that affects all children and young people, taking the evidence from our direct casework as a starting point. We do this through strategic litigation, policy work, campaigning and equipping others to work for children's rights. Our work in this area includes the Children's Rights Alliance for England and our Youth Justice Legal Centre project.

"JfKL have helped us gain a better understanding of the experiences of children and their families. This made a difference to the content of the review of children in need and helped us make better policy."

Department for Education Official

Monitoring Children's Rights

Following up on the recommendations the Government received from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016 is a core focus of our rights monitoring work. We continue to co-chair the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Action Group with the Department for Education and worked with officials to develop civil service training on children's rights and a child rights impact assessment template.

Throughout the year we engaged with both the UN Special Rapporteurs on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights during their official visits to the UK. Our engagement ensured that both End Of Mission Statements clearly highlighted key child rights issues, including the disproportionate number of BAME children excluded from school. And as a key member of the Children and Brexit Coalition we continued to work to ensure that there is no weakening of children's rights protections as a result of leaving the European Union.

Influencing Government

We took the evidence from our practice and fed it into various government and parliamentary reviews and consultations. We submitted evidence to the government's review of school exclusions as well as to the Department for Education's review of children in need. Officials visited us to discuss a number of our case studies and understand in more detail the challenges faced by children in need. The report of the outcomes of the review highlighted the benefits of our holistic casework model for children in need.

We have been working for many years to improve the quality of legal representation for children in court. Our work has led to the Bar Standards Board making it a requirement for barristers to register and declare they have the specialist knowledge, skills, and competencies to work with children and young people. However, further reform is needed and it was highly significant when last year with our support the Ministry of Justice set up a sector-led working group to improve the quality of youth court legal representation.



Children's
Rights Alliance
for England

Since 2015, the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), which promotes children's rights and monitors government implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, has been part of JfKL. CRAE fights for children's rights by listening to what children say, carrying out research to understand what children are going through and challenging those who violate children's rights. CRAE campaigns for the people in power to change things for children – and we empower children and those who care about children to push for the changes that they want to see.

Working for change

Change it!

Our Change it! project supports children to campaign for their right to adequate housing.

In June 2018, we published our research report *'It feels like being in prison': Children speak out on homelessness*, which includes six in-depth case studies with homeless children who continue to be or have been housed in bed & breakfasts and other forms of

temporary accommodation, giving powerful insight into the shocking conditions homeless children are living in and the damage being housed in this kind of accommodation causes to children's lives.

Its findings received high profile media attention with outlets including the BBC, the Sun and the Observer. Members of the steering group met with the Minister for Housing and Homelessness in the autumn and the Minister has agreed to meet with the children again in 2019.

Strategic Litigation

Just for Kids Law is one of the few children and young people's charities that takes on strategic legal cases to achieve wider social change.

We have recently made headlines in national media for issuing judicial review proceedings against the Home Office over its guidelines for the use of children as spies by the police and other investigative agencies. We also secured a landmark Supreme Court judgment on the disclosure of youth reprimands and cautions in criminal record checks, a decision that could benefit thousands of children issued with youth cautions every year.

Using the law for social change has long been a cornerstone of our work and we have produced a series of animated films drawing on the learning from our work setting out how strategic litigation can be used as a tool by charities fighting for progress.



"I commend the children and young people for their bravery in speaking out on an issue which is often wrongly shrouded in stigma and shame."

Chair, UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

No Child in Cells campaign

We continued to challenge local authorities about keeping children over night in police cells. We began a process of monitoring the government's national concordat that confirms local authorities must provide safe beds for children who have been charged with an offence and are waiting for a court appearance. We also started looking in more detail at the use of police cells before a child is charged with an offence.



Working for change

Training

Through our programme of high-quality, expert-led training sessions, we work to improve expertise and outcomes across the sector. The Youth Justice Legal Centre delivers a year-long series of trainings, seminars and masterclasses for solicitors, barristers, Youth Offending Teams and others working in the youth justice sector, culminating in the annual Youth Justice Summit. We also deliver trainings on immigration law and youth advocacy for a range of stakeholders. We try as much as possible to involve children and young people we work with in the training sessions, often involving them personally so they are able to use their experiences to inform others.

“Fantastic course: covered everything holistically and the involvement of young people added a really important dimension.”



YJLC

Youth Justice Legal Centre

Our Youth Justice Legal Centre (YJLC) project provides expertise, guidance and training to lawyers and other professionals. It held a second annual Youth Justice Summit in May 2018 on the theme of Children and the Police with over 170 attendees.

YJLC also steadily increased the number of practitioners it works with, providing expert legal advice and training. Last year the team trained over 130 solicitors, pupil barristers and Youth Offending Team staff and provided regular legal updates to over 1,200 subscribers. The Youth Justice Advice Line is an increasingly well-used resource, receiving over 20 enquiries every month.

In 2018, the Youth Justice Legal Centre:



Organised a Youth Justice Summit with

170
attendees



Provided training to over

130
professionals



Sent regular legal updates to over

1,200
subscribers

Looking to the future

In June 2018 we produced a new three year strategy that set out four strategic aims:

1. Secure outcomes for individual children and young people.
2. Secure changes to the legal, policy and practice environment for children and young people.
3. Maintain and develop a robust organisation using our strengths to maximum impact.
4. Develop an organisation in which participation is central to all our activities.

We also revised the values we put into practice 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.

As part of the new strategy in 2019 we plan to take forward a number of changes...

- We will develop new youth engagement and participation projects with the young people we work with and aim to provide more opportunities to our Youth Ambassadors group.
- We will take the learning from the evaluation of the Advocacy Year programme as it comes to the end of its three year funding to develop our direct casework model with young people.
- We will expand our work on school exclusions piloting a legal clinic and developing a new project to improve the quality of advice and support for children and young people.
- We will do more campaigning work to highlight the lack of social care and housing support for older teenagers and young people.
- We will support the young activists from our Let us Learn project to establish an independent migrant-led charity called We Belong.
- We will develop and implement new outcome indicators that demonstrate the real differences we make to the young people we support and review our annual client survey.
- We will carry out a salary review and further review our HR policies to ensure we are investing in our staff team.

Standing up for kids

JUST FOR KIDS



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