



Strategic Plan

June 2018 – June 2021

Summary

Just for Kids Law [JfKL] is a charity founded 12 years ago by two lawyers, Shauneen Lambe and Aika Stephenson, who recognised the children and young people they represented needed not only legal help but also support to address a range of issues, such as school exclusion, that had got them into trouble in the first place.

Today we help young people navigate their way through challenging times: whether they are facing difficulties at school, immigration problems, are homeless, in need of social care support or are caught up in the criminal justice system. We do this through our unique model of working with individual children and young people which combines direct advocacy and development opportunities with legal advice and representation. In 2017 we took on more than 2,200 cases. Nine out of ten of our clients told us they were happy with our support and that they knew more about their rights.

JfKL has gained a reputation for taking the evidence from our direct work with individual children and young people to fight for wider reform through strategic litigation and empowering children and young people to campaign. Over the last five years our campaigning has achieved significant changes to national law and legislation - one example being 17-year-olds are now treated legally as children in all regards when in contact with the police.

We also draw on our evidence to equip practitioners to work for children's rights and provide them with advice and expertise. Our Youth Justice Legal Centre has been at the forefront of training lawyers in representing children in court. And across the voluntary sector we lead on monitoring compliance with human rights by hosting the Children's Rights Alliance for England.

In preparing this strategic plan to take us through to June 2021 we have worked with our staff, trustees and stakeholders to

review all our work. This has resulted in a revised statement of our vision and mission.

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

Our model of individual case work is the foundation of what we do. Over the next three years we have set out an aim to replicate this model outside London so we can work with more children and young people. Critically this will provide us with a wider evidence base to fight for systemic reform.

We will also enhance our reputation for achieving reform by building on our existing strategic litigation capacity and our experience of empowering children and young people to work for change. As well as continuing to work on youth justice issues we have identified some specific issues - school exclusions, and housing and social care support for teenagers and young people - where we plan to focus our efforts to secure reform.

Our ambitions will not be achieved unless we continue to maintain and develop a strong organisation and also ensure children and young people's participation is central to all our activities. These will be important priorities as we move forward and make further progress.

Just for Kids Law has grown significantly since its humble beginnings in the basement of a north west London law firm. We will continue to grow in a sustainable way over the next three years and ensure more children and young people have their legal rights and entitlements respected and promoted, and their voices heard and valued.

Strategic Aim 1 Strategic Aim 2 Strategic Aim 3 Strategic Aim 4

Secure outcomes for individual children and young people	Secure changes to the legal, policy and practice environment for children and young people	Maintain and develop a robust organisation using our strengths to maximum impact	Develop an organisation in which participation is embedded in our work.
1a. Grow our current legal caseload sustainably	2a. Campaign for wider reform to reduce exclusions from school	3a. Secure a stable funding future	4a. Identify resources within JfKL to drive this work
1b. Develop the expertise of our advocates	2b Campaign for reform to housing and social care support for children and young people	3b. Develop our internal resources to recruit, retain and support staff	4b. Develop a shared definition of participation, and revised policy and practice guidelines
1c. Replicate our model and start advocacy, support and development opportunities work outside London	2c. Campaign on immigration policy as it affects children and young people, including supporting the 'Let Us Learn' campaign to look to become an independent charity 'We Belong'	3c. Develop our capabilities to respond emerging issues	4c. Review our existing work and look for more participation opportunities
1d. Develop the relationship between opportunities work and advocacy, to empower more of the children and young people we work with	2d. Campaign for youth justice reform on a specific number of areas	3d. Build a more cohesive, joined-up organisation	
1e. Consider how best to meet the emotional well-being and mental health needs of the children and young people we work with	2e. Monitor compliance with human rights	3e. Improve how we demonstrate our impact and capture learning	

Just for Kids Law - Who We Are And Where We've Come From

In 2016 we at Just for Kids Law celebrated our 10th anniversary. Our founders Shauneen Lambe and Aika Stephenson are lawyers who recognised that the children and young people they worked for often needed more than legal representation - they also needed support and advocacy to address the issues that had led them into the youth justice system in the first place - school exclusion and a lack of support for children with special education needs, children with mental health issues, children in the care system who were not receiving support, and children with housing problems.

Our first youth advocate was appointed in 2008 to work with and for children and young people on these issues. Three years later a youth opportunities worker was put in place to provide dedicated help to the young people we support to access education, training and employment. Since then JfKL's unique way of working, bringing together legal representation, direct advocacy and support to access opportunities, has steadily developed and grown.

We now work in 31 London boroughs, have more than 40 staff and our turnover for 2018/19 is £1.6million. We have successfully undertaken strategic litigation, including a landmark appeal to the High Court in relation to 17-year-olds not being detained as adults after arrest, and a Supreme Court case which secured greater access to funding for university for young migrants. These legal cases have been accompanied by public campaigns led by the young people themselves, and by influencing key decision-makers in Whitehall and Westminster. Over the last five years our campaigning has achieved three separate changes to national law and legislation.

We have spread our impact through the advice and training delivered by our Youth Justice Legal Centre and widened the scope of our work from casework and campaigning to holding government to account on their child rights obligations through the merger with the Children's Rights Alliance for England in 2015. The following year we launched a new initiative to widen our impact - Advocacy Year, in which graduates considering a career in law can train and work as a community-based youth advocate for 12 months. And in 2017 we moved to our own office, the first time the organisation became separate from a law firm, operating our own independent legal services.

Our 2017 Impact Report shows that:

- We took up 2209 individual cases through advocacy and legal representation (a 55% increase on the previous year).
- We offered advice through the Youth Justice Legal Centre in 250 cases (a 30% increase on the previous year).
- We supported 400 young people through 'Let Us Learn' advice and engaged 50 young people in public actions on our campaign to secure access to University for young migrants.
- 99% of our clients said they were happy with our support and 94% said they knew more about their rights.

In January 2018 we appointed our first full time Chief Executive, Enver Solomon, with a view to leading the next stage of JfKL's development and growth.

The Changing Environment In Which We Work

The world around us is changing rapidly.
Key impacts on our work include:

- The instability caused by Brexit - EU citizens are uncertain about their future rights in the UK, and there is also a lack of clarity about the overall legal framework for children and young people, for example relating to the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.
- The volatile UK political environment - Since 2017 there has been a minority government. The pressures of delivering Brexit, as well as managing a fragile political coalition, are leading to continued speculation about the stability of the government and limited ministerial or civil service capacity to address domestic policy issues.
- The impact of continued austerity - Rising levels of child poverty as a result of cuts to working age benefits are accompanied by reductions in public services, in particular local government services such as youth services, social care and support for young homeless people.
- The impact of specific government policies - Two examples include rising levels of school exclusions as schools struggle to deliver attainment targets coupled with cuts to school budgets and a sharp reduction in legal aid provision. For example, legal aid is no longer available for many children and young people in immigration cases.
- The changing digital environment - This is leading to new challenges for young people such as digital exclusion, and new risks, such as prosecutions for 'sexting'.
- Rising levels of emotional wellbeing and mental health issues - With one in four children estimated to have some need for mental health support, existing health and other services are not able to meet the demand, leaving many children anxious and unhappy, and families and other services frustrated about the lack of service response.

This changing, political, economic, social and technological environment means there is a growing need for our services because:

- Local authorities are less able to support the most vulnerable children and young people.
- Many forms of vital legal support have been wholly removed from the scope of legal aid.
- The lack of legal advice and representation means children and young people do not have their rights fulfilled, for example, education and social care legal provision is almost non-existent.

- The numbers of children and young people experiencing the various issues we support them with is rising, for example the number of children excluded from school is increasing¹, the number of children looked after is increasing² and the number of homeless children and young people is also on the rise.³
- There remains no statutory provision for holistic advocacy for children and young people at the point of need.

The impact of this on the work of Just for Kids Law is threefold:

1. There are more children and young people who require our services
2. The children and young people who come to us have higher needs
3. There are limited other services for us to signpost children and young people on to.

¹ Permanent exclusions across all state funded primary, secondary and special schools have increased from 5,795 in 2014/15 to 6,685 in 2015/16. In state funded primary schools the number of fixed term exclusions increased from 49,665 in 2014/15 to 55,740 in 2015/16. In state funded secondary schools they increased from 239,240 to 270,135.

² Numbers of children in care have risen for the ninth consecutive year and at the fastest rate in five years. 20 March 2017 figures show that there are 72,670 looked after children, an increase of 3% on the previous year.

³ The past decade has seen a huge growth in numbers of children experiencing homelessness and being forced to live in temporary (TA), including B and Bs, often for long periods of time. Figures show that 79,000 families are currently housed in TA in England, a staggering rise of 65% since 20102 and an increase of 8% on the previous year.

Our Vision, Our Mission And Our Values

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.

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.

Our values are to act with integrity, respect, courage and compassion. 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

Looking To The Future - Building On Our Core Strength

The diagram below represents the core strength of Just for Kids Law (JfKL) - using the work we do through our unique model of combining direct advocacy, support and development opportunities with legal representation for individual children and young people and then taking the evidence from this practice to push for wider systemic reform.

JfKL's model of individual casework is the foundation of what we do. It drives all our work for wider system reform. At the same time demand for JfKL's services is far greater than the organisation can currently meet - we estimate that we are unable to respond to one in five requests for support because of a lack of capacity.

We know that there is a substantial and growing need for our direct work and that we have developed a distinctive approach. Therefore, over the next three years we will consider replicating our model outside London, so we can work with more children and young people.

We will also work to build on our existing strategic litigation capacity, and our experience of empowering children and young people to work for change.

We will extend our work to equip practitioners and support the sectors in which we work and strengthen our capability to influence policy and practice from a rights-based perspective.

We will also look to develop new partnerships where there is a need for wider systemic reform and others are better placed to take the lead.



The Just for Kids Law Approach

Our Strategic Aims

From understanding our vision and mission, reviewing the environment in which we work and our core strengths, we have developed 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**

These four aims are equally important and over the next three years they will be given the same prioritisation. However, we recognise that both maintaining and developing a robust organisation and developing an organisation in which participation is central underpins all our work.

Achieving Our Aims: Priorities for Action

As part of our strategic planning we have identified a number of priority actions where we propose to build on our existing work and focus our attention between June 2018 and June 2021.

Aim 1: Secure outcomes for individual children and young people

Just for Kids Law currently undertakes work with individuals primarily in the following areas - youth justice, social care, immigration, education and housing. Individual casework is the bedrock of JfKL's work. It has grown from 473 cases in 2012/13 to 2209 cases in 2017, of which 291 required legal representation. We have considered whether the scope of our work should change and have concluded we should continue to work in these areas because we have the skills and track record and, critically, we continue to see a great need for our work in all of these areas. Our development priorities for the next three years are to:

Action 1A: Grow our current legal caseload sustainably

We now have legal aid contracts for immigration, community care and criminal casework. Although housing is a growing issue, we do not have in-house legal housing expertise and intend to continue to work in partnership with specialist housing lawyers. **Our priority for the next three years is to grow the number of legal cases we take on sustainably.**

Action 1B: Develop the expertise of our advocates

We currently have one specialist advocate for young parents, and we have considered whether further specialisation should be an area for development. However, we believe that, in general, the holistic work

that we do with children and young people is one of our strengths, therefore, we will not develop specialist advocates for other groups of children and young people. Over the next three years we will seek to develop the knowledge and expertise of our advocacy team across all the issues they work on.

Action 1C: Replicate our model and start advocacy, support and development opportunities work outside London

Our direct advocacy work only takes place in London. Our preliminary work indicates that there are no other organisations in the UK that deliver direct needs led advocacy and support combined with legal advice and representation, as Just for Kids Law does. We are also aware that there is great demand for our work and also that our campaigning capability is lessened because our evidence base primarily only relates to London.

Our priority for the next three years is to identify partners and funding for one or more new locations outside London to replicate our model of combining direct advocacy, support and development opportunities with legal representation for individual children and young people. We believe this will open up opportunities for new avenues of funding, will expand our profile and - critically - provide a wider evidence base to use to fight for systemic reform.

We have reviewed our Advocacy Year programme, a one-year traineeship for graduates interested in social justice and a possible career in law, and do not believe it is feasible to develop it into a national programme similar to TeachFirst or Frontline for children's social work because there is no equivalent advocacy profession and there is a shortage of viable partners and support infrastructure. However, we do believe there could be value in JfKL continuing to employ a number of trainee advocates in the same

way we employ trainee solicitors. Over the first 12 months of this strategy as we develop our plans to replicate our advocacy model we will consider the options for continuing to employ trainee advocates.

Action 1D: Develop the relationship between direct advocacy and opportunities work, to empower more of the children and young people we work with.

Our opportunities work builds on what we do when we first take up legal cases and advocate with and for young people. Our experience is that the relationship we form with the young person through our legal and advocacy work can then enable them to take up education or employment opportunities that they may not have taken up before. **We will, over the next three years, start to only provide opportunities work with young people where this relationship has been established.**

Action 1E: Consider how best to meet the emotional well-being and mental health needs of the children and young people we work with.

Increasingly, we find the children and young people we work with suffer from poor mental health and are struggling to find the support they need. The challenges of clinical governance mean that we do not consider it appropriate to take on in-house mental health expertise to meet these needs. **However, over the next three years we will look to identify ways to signpost and work in partnership with other organisations to ensure that those we work with get the emotional support they need.**

Aim 2: Secure changes to the legal, policy and practice environment for children and young people

We take the evidence from our individual case work to secure wider reform in the sectors or systems in which we work. Over previous years we have fought for reform in a wide range of areas, using various combinations of strategic litigation, influencing and youth-led campaigning. We believe we will have more impact if we are more purposeful in the issues we decide to work on, and choose the right action (or combination of actions) we decide to take.

In terms of selecting the issues we will work on, we have considered the following criteria:

- The fit of the issue with our vision and mission, in particular whether children's legal rights and entitlements are regularly being ignored;
- The trends we are seeing in our legal casework and advocacy practice;
- The likelihood of systemic change, given the current legal and policy landscape;
- Whether JfKL is the organisation best placed to take forward the issue, bearing in mind our existing expertise and reputation.

We have therefore identified a number of specific issues where we plan to focus our effort in securing wider reform over the next three years:

Action 2A: Exclusions from School

Children have a right to education, but increasing numbers are being excluded temporarily or permanently from school and are coming to JfKL for advice and support. There are opportunities to influence the system, with a DfE review

due to report by the end of 2018, and other policy interest. While many other voluntary organisations offer advice to parents or support with exclusion appeals for particular groups of children, few, if any, organisations can provide the combination of casework support, strategic litigation and influencing of JfKL.

We aim to review what the most effective way of addressing the issue in the next six months and develop an action plan. This will include:

- Engaging children and young people with lived experience of school exclusion to campaign.
- Scoping out options for strategic litigation.
- Examining how to equip advice and legal practitioners to support and represent children through the exclusion process.

Action 2B: Housing and social care support for children and young people

The so called Southwark Judgement, made in 2009, obliges Local Authority children's services to provide accommodation and support to homeless 16- and 17-year-olds. However, increasing number of cases are being seen by JfKL in which young people who have experienced family conflict or for one reason or another are homeless are not being offered such accommodation and support by their local authority and are 'sofa surfing' with friends and relations. We see a large number of young people aged 16 and over who are living in temporary or supported accommodation, and are not provided with the appropriate recognition; therefore they are not able to access the full range of special statutory support which should be available to them. For instance, care leavers are entitled to receive specific allowances and support with education, employment and training until they are at least 21. While other voluntary organisations support individuals and influence government on youth homelessness and supported housing, few, if any, can combine this with legal expertise.

We aim to review what the most effective way of addressing the issue in the next six months and develop an action plan. This will include:

- Examining the options for strategic litigation.
- Scoping the potential for training for housing practitioners which focuses on the statutory entitlements of young people at risk of homelessness or living in supported accommodation.
- Collating the evidence from our practice to influence both local and central government and engaging children and young people in this work.

Action 2C: Immigration - and supporting the 'Let Us Learn' campaign

JfKL provides immigration casework for young people, which distinguishes it from a number of organisations which campaign on this issue. In addition, JfKL set up the 'Let Us Learn' campaign led by young migrants seeking equal access to higher education and promoting the conditions by which young migrants can fully contribute to British society. It has been a powerful youth-led campaign and during the next 18 months, based on careful analysis and appropriate business planning, JfKL will look to spin it off into a separate organisation, 'We Belong'. We would work in close partnership with the new organisation and will be ready to raise other issues that come to our attention through our immigration casework primarily by working in partnership with others to campaign for policy reform.

Action 2D: Youth Justice

JfKL has a strong track record of working on a range of youth justice issues and delivering some important reforms, such as 17-year-olds detained in police custody being defined in law as children rather than adults. We are currently working on a number of different issues in the youth justice arena many of them through strategic litigation. These include use of police force, detention of young people in

cells overnight, criminalisation of children relating to ‘sexting’ and issues concerning the retention and disclosure of criminal records and the anonymity of young people.

We have also been operating the Youth Justice Legal Centre since 2015 to provide expertise, guidance and training to lawyers and other professionals. It has steadily increased the numbers it works with providing expert legal advice and training and has held two high profile youth justice summits. It was also instrumental in ensuring the Bar Standards Board introduced competencies for barristers appearing in the youth court or proceedings involving children.

In order to maximise the impact of our work, over the first six months of this strategy we intend to consider our focus on youth justice to identify the issues we want to prioritise for campaigning going forward. As the initial three year funding comes to an end in 2019 we will also review the work of the Youth Justice Legal Centre to determine what its next stage of development should be.

Action 2E: Monitoring compliance with human rights

JfKL is uniquely placed, through its expertise from the Children’s Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), to hold the government to account on its human rights obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) and other international human rights instruments. In particular, we will continue to ensure the government takes forward the recommendations it received from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN Committee) in 2016 and under Universal Periodic Review in 2017.

In the first year of the strategy we will review the best way of producing our *State of Children’s Rights in England* report and how it is used to hold government to account on its CRC obligations and coordinate the civil society report to the UN Committee ahead of the next UK examination in 2020.

Aim 3: Maintain and develop a robust organisation using our strengths to maximum impact

In order to secure outcomes for individual children and young people and secure wider reform we have to continue to develop a robust organisation and develop new capabilities:

Action 3A: Secure a stable funding future

A number of significant grants come to an end over the next three years. A revised fundraising strategy is currently under development and will be in place by September 2018. It will focus on growing our income from a wider pool of trusts and foundations, increasing support from corporations that provide grants, growing the number of high net worth individuals that support us and examining the potential for funding from metropolitan mayors and police and crime commissioners. In addition, we will examine opportunities for developing traded income by developing new training offers.

Action 3B: Develop our internal resources to recruit, retain and support staff

Our staff are critical to our success as an organisation. Human Resource Reviews were undertaken in 2017 and early 2018 which identified concern about inadequate systems and processes that have not kept pace with the organisation’s growth. We will continue to put in place the recommendations from those reviews over the first 18 months of this strategy.

We also know that we need to further develop our Trustee Board to ensure it is fit for purpose to be able to support and oversee the implementation of our new strategy. There are currently three vacancies so in the first six months of the strategy we will take action to review the skills and experience we need, then recruit, induct and support a skilled and diverse Trustee Board.

Action 3C: Develop our capabilities to respond to emerging issues

In preparing this Strategic Plan we have reviewed the work that we do and identified a specific number of issues where we intend to focus our efforts over the next three years. In addition, new issues will emerge over the coming months and years and so we also need to develop ways in which we:

- spot emerging trends in our practice
- use the criteria set out above, to identify whether we, as JfKL, should be taking strategic action on the issue
- select the most effective campaigning activity or combination of campaigning activities to achieve our ends
- build partnerships with other organisations where they are better placed to take forward some or all of the work.

Action 3D: Build a more cohesive joined up organisation

Spotting emerging trends and taking combined strategic action will require more effective working across the

organisation. We will therefore, over the next three years, seek out formal and informal ways of sharing information and skills in order to build a more cohesive organisation in which staff understand both the responsibilities and benefits (in terms of outcomes for children and young people) of more collaborative working.

We will also undertake a review of the presentation of the different ‘brands’ that JfKL currently hosts to consider whether greater impact could be achieved by presenting them more strongly under a JfKL banner.

Action 3E: Improve how we demonstrate our impact and capture learning

We will, over the next three years, look to improve our ability to assess and describe the impact of JfKL’s work, including how we capture learning and knowledge. We will build on our existing impact report to give a greater focus on outcomes as well as activities and outputs and seek to demonstrate the way in which JfKL is greater as a whole than the sum of its parts. Over the first year of this strategy we will review the data that we collect on both our individual casework and our work to achieve wider policy reform and examine how across the organisation we ensure learning is captured and used to inform all our work.

Aim 4: Develop an organisation in which participation is embedded in our work

Participation by children and young people forms a key part of much of JfKL's work, but it is not always clear why children and young people are supported to participate in some areas of work and not others. Resources for participation are spread across teams and funded within different programmes. Over the next three years we will:

Action 4A: Identify resources within JfKL to drive this work

Although participation workers support a number of activities, the allocation of participation resource is largely dependent on funding, not on strategic priority. We will start by reviewing current resources and whether they are in the right places and sufficient to drive forward this agenda.

Action 4B: Develop a shared definition of participation, and revised policy and practice guidelines

Many organisations draw on Hart's 'ladder of participation' with which to understand, review and progress participation beyond information and consultation to shared decision-making. We will use this approach and other models to develop a shared JfKL definition of participation, and to develop new policy and practice guidelines for staff to put these approaches into practice.

Action 4C: Review our existing work and look for more participation opportunities

In the light of the policy and practice guidelines we will review our current work programme and seek additional opportunities for children and young people to participate meaningfully in different aspects of the organisation. This will include governance and campaigning for wider reform as well as participation focused projects.

Future Actions

This strategy provides a clear direction of travel for JfKL over the next three years until June 2021. It is important to ensure that we assess how progress is being made towards meeting the aims and priority actions. Therefore, over the first six months of the strategy we will set out and agree milestones for each of the priority actions. We will also review the way in which the resources of JfKL match the priorities to ensure we are best placed to meet them.



If you would like more information on Just for Kids Law's work, or how you can support us, we would be delighted to hear from you. Find out more:

www.justforkidslaw.org

T: 0203 174 2279
E: info@justforkidslaw.org

North London office: Unit 4D, Leroy House, 436 Essex Rd, London N1 3QP
East London office: 105 Barking Road, Canning Town, London E16 4HQ

Registered charity in England and Wales (No. 1121638)
A company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (No. 5815338)