

Company number: 1408520

Charity Number: 280805

Disability Law Service

Report and financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2023

Disability Law Service

Fighting injustice for disabled people

Disability Law Service

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1. Reference and administrative information

Company number	1408520
Country of incorporation	United Kingdom
Charity number	280805
Country of registration	England and Wales
Registered office Operational address	The Foundry 17 Oval Way London SE11 5RR
Trustees	<p>Members of the charitable company guarantee to contribute an amount not exceeding £1 to the assets of the company in the event of winding up. The trustees have no beneficial interest in the charitable company.</p> <p>Lynn Cox - Chair (from 28 January 2022 to 16 February 2024) Eleanor Hassall Ellie McFatridge-Staves Edward Richards Vijay Samtani Alexander Woolfson John Horan (to September 2022) Brenda Parkes (to September 2022) Mark Newbery (to December 2022) Emma Vogelmann (to February 2023) Berit Thoresen (to December 2023) Mark Newbery (from 14 February 2024)</p>
Principal Staff	<p>David Laurence - Chief Executive (to June 2022) Eric Appleby - Interim CEO (July 2022 to January 2023) Mike Smith - Chief Executive (from February 2023)</p> <p>Eric Appleby Director of Operations and Fundraising (to June 2022)</p>
President	Lynne Brooke

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Patrons	Prof. Luke Clements Rt. Hon. Sir Ed Davey MP Andrew Small
Bankers	Unity Trust Bank plc PO Box 7193 Planetary Road Willenhall WV1 9DG
Independent Examiner	Fleur Holden FCA Sayer Vincent LLP 110 Golden Lane London EC1Y 0TL

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2. Chair and Trustees' statement

I was delighted to join the Board of DLS formally in January 2022. It was obvious to me that Disabled and neurodiverse people were having a particularly tough couple of years with the pandemic, on top of the other existing barriers placed in our way. I felt that it was important to help Disabled and neurodiverse people to know their rights and to assist them via our lawyers and helpline staff.

We've had a good look at our post pandemic future, identifying the new legal areas of Discrimination and Public Law to expand our legal aid work. We've appointed our new CEO, Mike Smith, who has come into the organisation with 15 years of experience at the forefront of disability provision within Tower Hamlets, and previously been the Disability Commissioner at the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Since then, we've identified and started to implement a number of projects, internal processes, fundraising activities and a review of our communications.

The Board would like to thank all of the staff team for their hard work, and for making such an important difference to Disabled people's lives. We were sad to see our previous CEO, David Laurence, move on. We're grateful to him for his huge contribution to DLS since the summer of 2016 and we wish him well. We also thank Eric Appleby for his dedication to DLS over many years, including most recently taking on the role of interim CEO for six months.

3. CEO statement

I was excited to take on the role of CEO of Disability Law Service. I started part-time at the beginning of February 2023, as I transitioned from my previous organisation, becoming full-time from 1 April 2023. I was grateful for the outgoing Interim CEO, Eric Appleby, being highly supportive during that transition period and afterwards. He had done a great job over the previous few years, alongside the previous CEO, in building and growing the organisation and the team. Eric has now retired and we wish him all the very best.

I am always impressed by the commitment and professionalism of the staff team. I'm very much looking forward to working with them to continue to deliver amazing outcomes for our clients, and finding new ways to capture and tell the impact of our work. In common with most not-for-profit organisations in the legal advice sector, the organisation faced a challenging time working remotely during the pandemic. It's great to see the staff coalescing to move forward together.

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4. About DLS

Disability Law Service (DLS) is a unique national charity that has been providing free legal advice and representation for Disabled people since 1975. It was born out of a parent self-help group which – with solicitors and barristers who advised Disabled people – realised the need and set up what has become a significant provider of social benefit. A few years ago, it transformed into a Disabled-led organisation.

Our purpose is to challenge the poverty and inequality Disabled people face by securing access to legal rights and entitlements.

DLS is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.

4.1. Our vision, mission and values

Our Vision: The DLS vision is to work towards an equitable and accessible society, eliminating discrimination and ensuring that the rights of Disabled people, their carers and families are upheld.

Our mission: Our mission is to provide free legal advice to Disabled people and their carers to ensure that they have access to their rights and justice.

Our values:

- **Accessibility** – sensitive and proactive to the individual needs and preferences of our users; we will be flexible in the way we make our services available.
- **Inclusivity** – we will carry out our work, in partnership with service users, in a way that is enabling of Disabled people. We will take their views into account, to improve and develop our work.
- **Respect** - we will treat our service users with respect at all times, respect confidentiality, be empathetic to our service users' problems and offer accurate, realistic advice.
- **Excellence** – we will constantly monitor our work to ensure it is carried out to the highest standards and meets the changing needs of our service users.
- **Partnership** – in pursuing our Mission, we will actively seek to work with other organisations.

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4.2. Our aims and objectives

The charity aims to:

- Provide a quality legal service which enables Disabled people to access relevant information, clarify their rights and take appropriate action
- Answer all queries clearly, concisely, accurately and with understanding
- Deal with clients' problems with care and as quickly as possible
- Achieve these aims in partnership with other organisations and agencies

Its current key objectives are:

- To ensure that Disabled people have access to high quality, specialist legal services
- To improve awareness and understanding of the legal rights of Disabled people and the range of legal and advice services available to them
- To challenge discrimination and exclusion by enforcing and strengthening laws that protect the opportunities, choices and legal rights of Disabled people
- To ensure DLS is high performing, well run and well regarded

DLS is the only dedicated provider of expert, specialist legal help focusing on the issues arising from disability. Over the 49 years of its existence, it has helped hundreds of thousands of Disabled people and their families to gain access to justice, to care and to their rights under law. It has also had a significant influence on policy and on case law, with high profile victories on Judicial Review and in the European Court of Human Rights. We reach thousands of people every year, and are facing a constantly growing demand.

4.3. Review of the year in 2022/23 (key successes)

Over the last 12 months DLS staff and clients have achieved considerable successes. Overviews of each service and the details of this work are provided further on in this annual report. For now, we wanted to highlight some of the work we are most proud of. In the period June 2022 to May 2023, we achieved:

- A 20% increase in the demand for our Employment service with enquiries exceeding 1800. Our Employment project (funded by Trust for London) undertook over 1500 acts of assistance to support clients during this period.

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- Over 1000 enquiries and 200 outreach appointments by our Welfare and Benefits team (funded by Three Guineas Trust).
- £391,409 in financial gains to clients of the Welfare and Benefits team. However, the total figure is much higher as we do not record the financial outcomes from one-off advice.
- An increase in enquiries relating to benefits from people with multiple sclerosis from around 1400 to 1700 from 2021/22 to 2022/3. The MS Benefits team (funded by the Multiple Sclerosis Society) assisted 236 more people with MS than the previous year, and the number of acts of assistance to support these clients increased by about 20% from the previous 12 months.
- Support to more than 540 people with multiple sclerosis from our MS Legal Officer (also funded by the Multiple Sclerosis Society). Acts of assistance increased from over 1600 per year to over 1900 per year.
- Over £1 million in financial gains for clients with MS
- 49 legal aid cases in the areas of housing and community care. 3 of these were certificated.
- Over 450 people who called the Housing and Community Care Helplines were provided with advice.
- 2 research projects in the areas of: Ending discrimination against autistic children; and Ending charging for non-residential care for Disabled adults in England. The outcomes of this research are significant and have already had an impact on changing policies at a local authority level. The research papers will be published this coming year.
- Training to more than 10 organisations in the areas of employment, welfare benefits, housing, community care, discrimination, and the Equality Act.

5. Public benefit

The Trustees have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity's aims and objectives and in planning its future activities. In particular, the Trustees consider how planned activities will contribute to the aims and objectives that have been set. In order to achieve these charitable objectives, DLS provided the following services during the period June 2022-May 2023.

5.1. Overview of advice lines and specialist advice

Advice Lines

We operate advice lines in the areas of community care, employment, housing and welfare benefits. These offer a first – and sometimes the last – port of call for Disabled people experiencing issues of discrimination or an inability to secure their rights.

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Our clients can access the following free telephone advice lines:

- Benefits Advice line
- Advice Helpline (community care and housing)
- Legal Aid line (for those eligible for legal aid representation in community care and housing)
- London Employment (employment and discrimination advice for those in London)
- Rest of England Employment (employment and discrimination advice for those outside London)
- MS Legal Officer (employment, discrimination, and community care advice limited to those with MS)
- MS Benefits (welfare benefits advice limited to those with MS)
- Emergency line (an emergency contact line for legal aid clients)

In addition, our service users can access all the above by email and post.

Where appropriate, people will be given advice to help them take the next step. Where more detailed help is needed their case may be picked up by one of our specialist solicitors or benefits advisors, although we have limits on the level of detailed casework we can support.

While a lot of this work is funded either by specific grants (for Employment and Welfare Benefits) or via Legal Aid, not every case is covered under these headings. For this reason, we operate what is - to the best of our knowledge - the only national free helpline service for community care and housing. This covers the many areas that are out of scope of legal aid and assists those who just fail to comply with the rigid financial eligibility criteria. These are Disabled people who have nowhere else to turn. Those who we are unable to assist are signposted or referred to other organisations who can help.

Specialist Legal Advice

This service gives Disabled people access to a solicitor or experienced adviser for free, providing confidential legal advice in the areas of community care, employment (including workplace discrimination) housing and welfare benefits. Each advisor provides telephone advice and responds to email and letter enquiries. Our SQM quality mark was renewed last year, and we remain a Centre of Excellence under the London Legal Support Trust programme.

5.2. Making a difference - housing

We have a Legal Aid Contract to provide help to people with housing related matters and disputes. We help with advice and representation in homelessness reviews and appeals, unlawful evictions and harassment, landlord disputes, possessions, disrepair

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(where there is evidence to link disrepair to harm to health /risk of harm to health) and defending Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs).

We can provide “controlled” legal help and “licensed” legal help. Controlled legal help includes advice and representation in legal proceedings up to, but not including representation in court proceedings. We can act on controlled work if we consider the public interest test is satisfied (i.e. reasonable prospect of success - to not waste public money). Representation in court proceedings is licensed work and can only be undertaken with permission of the Legal Aid Agency on a case-by-case basis.

Calls to our service can be triaged into signposting, initial or ongoing advice, coaching and mentoring, or into Legal Aid controlled or licensed work.

For those who are not eligible for legal aid we provide a helpline advice service, although funding constraints mean that we are unable to provide a casework service or representation.

Over the last 12 months, we had over 390 enquiries through our housing advice helpline, of which over 90% were provided with advice.

The legal aid team also provided hundreds of people with legal aid advice relating to housing and undertook 18 legal aid cases.

Our Housing Advisors can be reached from 2pm – 5.30pm on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

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Case Studies

Client is Disabled, predominantly by MS. Client came to us because her landlord had begun court proceedings to evict her.

Client had transferred to her new home in Autumn of last year to escape domestic violence. Unfortunately, due to a lack of support and receiving misleading information, her housing benefit entitlement was not transferred to her new local authority. This meant she was receiving no housing benefit upon start of her new tenancy and therefore fell into rent arrears.

Client's landlord on 24 March 2022 made a claim for possession of client's home. At the date of issue of the proceedings, the rent arrears were close to £3,000. A possession court hearing was scheduled for 01 July 2022 at Brentford County Court.

We took detailed instructions. We immediately corresponded to client's local authority concerning an application for a discretionary prevention grant to clear her arrears. The local authority confirmed to us a grant of £2,494.31 has been awarded to client and that it would soon be paid to the landlord.

We then immediately submitted a detailed defence and notice of acting to the court and landlord.

Following our defence, the landlord advised us they will be withdrawing the claim. The court then ordered that the claim be dismissed and hearing vacated. The client was very relieved and thanked us for our help.

Mr M approached us to assist him in his s202 review against a housing decision finding that he was intentionally homeless for leaving an accommodation available to him in Norway when he moved to UK in 2019, meaning the authority would not assist him. We successfully argued that this was a wrong interpretation and that the tenancy accommodation he left behind in Norway was not in his name and should not be considered a settled accommodation. Instead, accommodation he had resided in since he arrived in July 2019 should be considered in terms of his residency, and that he also left to join family and friends in the UK for a better life, quoting his Article 8 rights to family life. On 12th August 2022, we received a decision overturning the previous decision and now finding that he was not intentionally homeless.

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5.3. Making a difference - community care

Community care refers to the services provided by social services and the NHS to help adults, children and their carers with their care needs. This can include help at home, respite care, access to the community, travel assistance, residential care and adaptations to homes.

The law in community care is used to challenge decisions made by local authorities and NHS trusts. The common breaches of law include removal or reductions in care packages, delays or refusals in assessments and incorrect or unfair charges for necessary services.

Service users generally approach us for advice on a variety of community care matters such as; direct payments, disabled facilities grants, financial assessments, wanting to dispute the outcome of their needs assessments, residential care, children assessments and various disputes with the local authority.

Disappointingly, the care needs of Disabled people are increasingly not being met by Local Authorities across England and Wales. The Care Act 2014, whilst well-intentioned, has failed to put into practice its principles of choice, control and wellbeing. Local Authorities are struggling to find the resources and capacity to implement the outcomes of care assessments in the community and there is a distinct lack of leadership to implement the framework with its new approach.

Whilst Disabled people continue to have to contribute to the cost of their social care, we have noticed a concerning trend where local authorities are increasingly not accepting disability related expenditure in the financial assessment. In community care law, a dispute around this issue can take a long time to resolve (sometimes more than a year) which often causes a build-up in arrears on the client's account. This is most often the case when Disabled people do not have the necessary funds to pay the contribution whilst the dispute is underway.

As a result of this, more people are seeking legal representation to support their appeal to ensure that these expenses are acknowledged by the local authority. Unfortunately, local authorities are falling short of implementing the formal processes and guidance of the Act, but also their own policies.

Over the last 12 months, over 250 people received advice from our Community Care Helpline.

We have a legal aid contract for community care and can help those who are eligible, including case work and court appearances. During the last 12 months, our legal aid team provided hundreds of people with community care legal aid advice. They undertook 31 legal aid cases and 3 certificated cases during this period.

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Our Community Care Advisors can be reached 2pm – 5.30pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Case Studies

We opened this case in June 2021. This client has both a mental health and physical health impairment. This client had 2 main issues: their care and support and issues around annual leave.

Care and Support

When we took on the case, the client was receiving 10 hours of care and support under s.117 of the Mental Health Act 1983. It had been discussed that the client should receive a further 11 hours of care and support under the Care Act 2014 but this had never been processed. The LA claimed that this was because the client and their family had refused to have a financial assessment. The client and their family denied this. The LA failed to provide credible evidence to support this. The client and their family agreed to a financial assessment.

From our review of the case, it did not appear clear how the LA had determined how many hours should be provided under s.117 and the Care Act 2014. We wrote to the LA repeatedly to ask for clarity on this. After a long period of time of negotiating with the LA, the LA agreed to re-assess this and determined that the client should receive 95% of care under s.117, approximately 20 hours and 5% under the Care Act 2014, about 1 hour. When the LA completed a financial assessment, it determined the client should not pay any contribution towards their care.

Annual leave

The client's PA was the sister. When the client's sister was on annual leave, the client's brother provided care and support. The client's instructions were that the brother had not been paid by the LA in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2020. The LA's position was that the client and their family had not followed the correct procedure to receive payment for annual leave cover. After a long period of time of negotiating with the LA, it agreed to pay the client's brother for the annual leave cover in the years 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020.

The LA apologised to the client and their family for the time it took to review the care and support hours. As an acknowledgement for the stress and time caused to the client and the family, the LA paid an ex-gratia payment of £300 to the client and their family.

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BH has been trying to access social care support for over one year. He instructed us because the assessment carried out by the social worker was incorrect and stated he was ineligible for care.

We took his instructions and wrote to the local authority who agreed to do another assessment with a new social worker. We requested interim care pending the completion of the assessment, but the local authority only offered reablement care which was not suited to the client. The client wanted interim direct payments so he could pay for his own carer to meet his needs. We obtained medical evidence to show why reablement care was not suited to the client and continued to chase the legal team for updates.

The council agreed to provide the client with interim direct payments, so he now has care in place daily until the completion of his new assessment in 6 weeks' time.

5.4. Making a difference - employment

DLS receives funding from Trust for London to deliver specialist legal advice, support and representation on Employment Law issues to Disabled people living in the London area. This year, we were pleased to receive confirmation of renewed funding from the Trust for London for our Employment Service. This service is mainly delivered through an employment helpline operated by our Senior Employment Solicitor who has 30 years' post-qualification experience. Typically, we receive around 30-40 enquiries on employment matters each week and aim to get back to every person who contacts us within 3 working days. The advice line is for Disabled Londoners. A parallel 'quick' advice line is available for Disabled people resident in other parts of the country.

Our advice is usually in respect of discrimination in the workplace – failure to make reasonable adjustments and discrimination arising from disability being the most common issues – but we also advise on unfair dismissal, whistleblowing and unlawful deduction of wages matters. We make clients aware of the difficulties inherent in all legal proceedings and our preferred outcome is for clients to be able to retain their roles.

In the last 3 years, we have had approximately 3250 client contacts. Considering the number of enquiries we receive, we are mainly providing an advice line service, although we do assist in drafting pleadings, schedules of loss, lists of issues, further particulars of claim and witness statements. These are all aspects which our Disabled clients frequently struggle with. We have also represented clients in hearings around 20 times, as well as referring cases to the Free Representation Unit if appropriate – although unfortunately our claims do not often get picked up as disability discrimination

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claims are generally listed for longer than barristers are prepared to do on a pro bono basis.

In cases where it is not possible to provide a Claimant with representation, we support them with advice and guidance on representing themselves before a Tribunal. This has led to several successful outcomes.

The need for this service continues to increase with the total number of enquiries on employment matters exceeding 1820 in the past 12 months, this is nearly a 20% increase on the previous year. During the last year, our Employment Solicitor has taken 1542 acts of assistance to support clients accessing this service.

We have also continued our campaign to provide more assistance in the workplace for Carers of Disabled people and have liaised with Carers UK in connection with their campaign to have caring recognised as a protected characteristic.

Case Studies

JH experiences PTSD due to domestic abuse some time ago. She worked in a clothes boutique which had two branches. She had an arrangement that she would not have to work in the busier branch at weekends as this could induce symptoms from her PTSD. However, in Autumn 2022 she was given a new rota which required her to work in the busier shop at weekends. She raised this with the owner and was asked to attend a meeting. She did so and was dismissed – purportedly on account of her ‘attitude’.

She complained about this and was contacted by an HR company working for the employer who informed her that her ‘appeal’ would take place the next week. She attended that meeting and made it clear that she had not appealed and that she did not think she could return to work at the shop. However, the employer purported to accept her appeal and reinstate her. Despite her making clear she was not returning, they specified a return date and, 10 days after that, informed her that she had been dismissed for ‘unauthorised absence’. We advised her that this approach by the Employer was likely due to them being advised that the dismissal had been unfair and that this was their best course to try to save their position.

We advised JH to contact Acas to commence early conciliation, and we advised her as to how to proceed with that. No doubt the employer was concerned that they had no good defence to the claim as conciliation resulted in settlement of the claim on the basis of a payment of £12,500 to JH.

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5.5. Making a difference - welfare and benefits

This project was born out of DLS' recognition - both from our own work and from evidence elsewhere - that there is not just a shortage of advice available to Disabled people, but also a desperate lack of knowledge around rights in the complex area of community care and welfare benefits. As a result, people are frequently not aware of the need or potential for advice, leading inevitably to a chronic lack of access to justice, rights, services and benefits.

DLS therefore wanted to establish a project that would not only make benefits advice available to Disabled people but would also offer access both to knowledge of their rights and to immediate, expert advice on how to gain their wider entitlements. This has been achieved in part by running an outreach service in 3 London Boroughs for the last 6 years allowing people access to specialist advice within their community. Over the last 12 months, we have been providing outreach sessions to individuals associated with Greenwich MIND, Hackney MIND and Camden Carers. Due to the lasting effects of Covid, the majority of these sessions were held online. However, once it was considered safe to do so, face-to-face sessions recommenced in April 2023.

Each week, as part of the outreach, our Senior Benefits Advisor offers 9 x 3-hour appointments. In the last year, 203 outreach appointments took place. This is a slight decrease on the year before.

In addition to the outreach service, we have our specialist disability benefits advice service which is a dedicated advice line and email service supplemented by enquiries coming through the DLS main switchboard and via our website. With the volume of calls and emails greater than can be dealt with on the spot, those clients that cannot be given advice immediately have their details noted and are contacted. We have set ourselves a target of responding to all enquiries within 3 working days.

Over the last 12 months, we received 664 calls and more than 350 emails. Approximately one third of these enquiries were relating to Personal Independence Payments (PIP). Other common advice pertained to the topics of Universal Credit, Disability Living Allowance, and Employment and Support Allowance. Much of the advice given on our helpline is just that – one-off advice on entitlements, interpretation of rules, how to proceed etc and so we do not get to hear the results in terms of financial outcomes most times. However, where there is casework involved then we do see the outcome and over the last year we are able to detail over £391,409 gained for our clients. This sum results from work with just a handful of clients that we advised over the year and thus the overall figure is certainly much higher and, we estimate, likely to be over £1m.

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Our Welfare team also provided numerous training sessions to partner organisations. Please review the training section of the annual report to see what was delivered in the last year. Finally, our Welfare Officer wrote an article about benefits for Disabled people in the October edition of SRUK's magazine.

Case Studies

Miss K sought advice after receiving a Mandatory Reconsideration Decision Notice finding her fit for work for Universal Credit (UC). Miss K has arthritis in her foot after suffering a number of injuries in 2017 and 2018 as well as anxiety following previous traumatic events. Her UC work coach was applying pressure for her to find work and to also attend the job centre for appointments despite evidence of her foot pain and anxiety. We asked UC to carry out reasonable adjustments and her work coach agreed to change the appointment to telephone which the client was able to manage. We also asked UC to use their discretion under Complex Needs while we waited for the appeal hearing. We lodged the appeal for Miss K and sought evidence from her GP, orthopaedic consultant and MIND counsellor. The appeal was finally heard this month. The Tribunal allowed the appeal and Miss K was found to have limited capability for work related activity meaning no more appointments and an extra £354.28 per month.

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Client N was referred to our outreach service by his mental health care co-ordinator; he is a single man aged 50 living with schizophrenia. He had previously been awarded PIP at Tribunal 3 years before, but this had been terminated when he scored 0 points on a renewal application. We requested a late mandatory reconsideration on his behalf which was unsuccessful, so we duly lodged an appeal with the Tribunal's Service. The loss of the client's PIP meant that he had lost a total of over £159 per week in his combined income from PIP and ESA. The client was struggling badly with budgeting, so we referred him to a local debt charity that supported him until his PIP was reinstated.

Whilst waiting for the appeal hearing date, we gathered evidence from his new psychiatrist and a personal statement from his sister who acted as his main carer. His debt adviser also provided a supporting letter.

Some 9 months later we finally had his appeal hearing by video. The Tribunal didn't ask the client any questions as they were satisfied by our Submission as his representative and the additional evidence we had provided. This was a relief to our client as he was very concerned about having to discuss his mental health with strangers. The client was awarded the Enhanced Rate of Daily Living and the Standard Rate of Mobility of PIP for 10 years. The arrears paid to the client amounted to over £10,000. This paid off his utility debts and his weekly income is now more than his previous award of PIP.

5.6. Making a difference - people with MS

The Multiple Sclerosis Society (MS Society) and DLS have worked in partnership to support those with MS for more than 20 years.

The MS Legal Officer post was created in 2008 and continues to provide high quality advice and casework support in employment, community care and discrimination to those with MS. Our MS benefits advice service commenced in January 2019 and has now been expanded to encompass two advisors and extended opening hours.

These two projects exist separately from the Trust for London Employment project and the Three Guineas Welfare Advice project, however, there is a great deal of crossover and when possible best practice and learnings are shared across teams. If a staff member is off sick or on annual leave, the expertise of all these staff allows them to provide cover for each other's service.

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MS welfare and benefits

Many people with MS can struggle financially because of the effects of their MS – estimates show that living with a neurological condition, such as MS, can on average cost an additional £200 per week.¹ This demonstrates the integral role that benefits can have in enabling people with MS to live independent lives and work for longer periods.

Our MS Benefits Advice Service provides people affected by MS with priority access to high quality specialist advice and information to minimise the financial impact of MS by use of welfare benefits. This service is operated by 2 Welfare Benefits Advisors and is open to all people affected by MS in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. This is achieved by providing a free advice line and written enquiry support. We also provide casework in certain circumstances where capacity allows, and where it is deemed appropriate.

The cost-of-living crisis, coupled with the challenges of navigating the benefits system, are some reasons as to why we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the demand for this service. Comparing the last 12 months (2022-2023) to the previous 12 months (2021-2022), we have seen the total number of enquiries for this service increase from 1417 to 1714. This is an increase of around 28 enquiries per week to 33. Over the last year, our Welfare Advisors have assisted 236 more people with MS than the previous year, amounting to 1415 in total. Furthermore, the number of acts of assistance to support these clients increased by about 20% from the previous 12 months.

The estimated financial claims for clients over this period are £745,859. This was for 173 clients. The actual figure is likely to be much higher than this, as a large proportion of our enquiries are about Personal Independence Payment (PIP), and we are normally unable to record accurate outcomes on this.

Whenever possible, we endeavour to find different platforms to offer important advice and information about benefits to people with MS. In the last year, we have done this by going live on Facebook to talk about Personal Independent Payments, and publishing advice in various blogs and social media posts. One of our MS Benefits Advisers even gave a presentation about benefits and other disability support at the MS Society's Living Well webinar in January 2023. She received excellent feedback from staff and attendees:

- "Thank you for this session, and for sharing the info about the railcard on Facebook as I hadn't realized I was eligible for that."
- "Thank you so much for this information, it has helped me making the decision on whether I am entitled to apply for PIP."

¹ Quote taken from The MS Society UK wide Welfare Benefits Service booklet 2021

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It is evident that there is a significant growing demand for this service, and it is quite exceptional that our staff were able to successfully manage the increased workload, particularly in light of staff shortages within the team at certain points during the year. This service is vital in supporting people with MS to understand and exercise their rights, and we will work closely with the MS Society and other funders to ensure its continuation.

Case studies

A is in their 40s and lives in England. They contacted us for help appealing their PIP decision. They had been awarded standard rate PIP for daily living and mobility but thought they should be entitled to enhanced mobility as it was unsafe for them to leave the house without someone with them due to panic attacks and loss of vision. We advised A to get bespoke medical evidence, gave them template letters to use and gave A feedback on their appeal statement to help them make a strong case. A called up to thank us for our help, as they were awarded the enhanced rate mobility component of PIP. A said "Thanks again for all of your help. The letter templates were great."

B is in their 50s and lives in Yorkshire. B initially wanted help with their PIP appeal and after advice from us, their appeal was successful – they were awarded the top rate of PIP. B then contacted us as they had to leave work due to ill health and wanted to know if they were entitled to any financial support on top of their work pension. We advised B that they could be entitled to a Disabled Band Reduction on their Council Tax.

B contacted us to say, "Many thanks for your time the other day it is very much appreciated. Good news. I applied for the band reduction and they approved within 48 hours. It was very easy to apply for and very efficient. I wasn't aware of the benefit which they backdated to the date I moved into the house. Annual saving is £450. Many thanks again for your advice."

MS legal line

The MS Society also funds the DLS to employ a Legal Officer dedicated to providing free legal advice and support for people with MS, and their carers living in England and Wales. The MS Legal Officer (MSLO) can advise on the following areas of law:

- Employment

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- Disability Discrimination
- Goods and Services
- Community Care

In certain circumstances, the MSLO may take on an individual's case and provide representation.

People affected by MS can call, write, email or submit an enquiry via the DLS website to the MSLO. Should they wish to receive legal advice over the telephone, the MSLO runs telephone advice sessions Monday to Friday 9-7pm. If nobody is available to take the call, clients can leave a voice message and will be called back within 3 working days.

In the last year, the MS Legal Advice line received 735 enquiries, averaging around 18-19 per week. During this period, the MSLO assisted 544 people with MS, by offering 1923 acts of assistance. This is an increase on the previous year, which was 1732.

On average about half of all enquiries during the last year were related to employment issues. Community care was the second biggest category, followed by enquiries relating to discrimination matters. Around 37% of enquiries this year were from individuals referred directly by the MS Society themselves and just over 25% were previous service users. The fact that clients are returning to our service for further (or different) advice demonstrates that we have developed a strong rapport with clients and delivered reliable and trustworthy advice.

The MSLO also assisted clients to secure reasonable adjustments to help them stay in employment, ill health retirement benefits and care plan reviews.

The financial gains recorded for clients during that period were £270,861.

In addition to running the legal advice line, the MSLO was also a speaker at the 'MSS Work and MS' webinar on 26 April 2023. Furthermore, they reviewed the MSS 'MS in the workplace' online content and booklet and provided the MSS Policy Team with advice on the new Carer's Leave Act.

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Case Studies

D is a 57-year-old from Somerset. He contacted the MSLO having been dismissed for gross misconduct relating to an alleged data breach. The MSLO advised him on pursuing an appeal. On appeal the dismissal was changed from on the grounds gross misconduct to 'some other substantial reason', with notice. The MSLO advised that the former employer appeared to have acknowledged that his MS could cause loss of control over impulses leading to inappropriate behaviour. It could therefore be argued that the alleged data breach was something arising in consequence of his MS and grounds for a claim under section 15 Equality Act 2010. The MSLO advised D on Acas Early Conciliation and he negotiated a settlement of £11,000. D said: "I would like to thank you for your support and advice along the way."

S is a 46-year-old from Bristol. She contacted the MSLO having been dismissed for allegedly failing to report her sickness absence during her probationary period. A new job offer was subsequently withdrawn due to the reference stating she had been dismissed for gross misconduct. The MSLO helped S appeal the decision. The employer acknowledged the reason for dismissal was incorrect and changed it to a dismissal with notice. The MSLO lodged a complaint of disability discrimination in the Employment Tribunal on S's behalf. The employer initially offered compensation of £3,000. S subsequently secured new employment and the MSLO negotiated compensation for her of £12,500. S said: "omg I feel soo blessed thank you soo much for all of your works and support".

5.7. Policy and advocacy

As a small organisation, we focus our policy work on areas where our specialist expertise adds value. Over the last 12 months we have continued to expand our policy work as set out below.

Ending charging for non-residential care for Disabled people in England

As part of the Justice First Fellowship, one of our Solicitors undertook a research project investigating the effects of abolishing home care charging for adults in England. Working closely with DLS colleagues, Linklaters law firm and the Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, they undertook the following activities:

- A survey to Disabled people living in Hammersmith and Fulham who do not pay for home care
- A survey to Disabled people in England who pay for home care

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- 1 focus group with Hammersmith and Fulham Disabled residents
- 1 focus group with Disabled people resident elsewhere
- Submitted Freedom of Information requests to 40 local authorities
- Compiled real-life stories from Disabled adults living in Hammersmith and Fulham and the rest of England

Following the analysis of the data, they have written up the research findings and produced a best practice document detailing how other local authorities can learn from Hammersmith and Fulham and facilitate a policy of home care for Disabled people free at the point of use. His research paper will be published in 2024.

Ending discrimination against Autistic children

Our campaign to end discrimination against autistic children by local authorities has made considerable strides. Working with one of our patrons, Professor Luke Clements, Leeds University, Cerebra and the BBC, we produced the “Autism Plus Report” which identified 41 local authorities that restricted the rights of Disabled children with autism to specialist support from English Children’s Services departments because they did not have another impairment or a formal diagnosis.

In 2020, the BBC published the report on its national website and in a piece on regional TV in the North of England. Sir Ed Davey’s open letter to all local authorities in England was also linked to the BBC website.

In the last year follow-up work has been undertaken to establish that 30 of the 41 local authorities have changed or have committed to change their policies in these areas, in large part because of our report. The other 11 local authorities have yet to change their policy. We will be doing some further work challenging this in the coming months.

The full report will also be published in 2024.

5.8. Training

We see training other organisations in disability law and the Equality Act as hugely important. By providing a basic knowledge of the rights of Disabled people we empower helpline workers and frontline staff at other organisations to provide basic advice and to know when a referral to us makes sense.

A key component of the enhanced grant from the Three Guineas Trust during this year was the provision of training for partner charities’ staff and volunteers. In the past, this has proved successful and been greatly appreciated by the recipient organisations. Initially, we were providing three core training sessions on the following topics:

- Universal Credit (UC).
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

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- Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance (DLA/AA)

We also delivered personalised/tailored training on:

- Council Tax Reduction
- Personal Independence Payment and Mental Health
- Disability Living Allowance and Severe Mental Impairment

Each of these were a mixture of half day and full day training packages incorporating practical exercises and accompanied by a help-sheet setting out finer detail and sources of further information. They were tailored to the specific needs of the recipient organisation. Training was delivered online and face to face.

Feedback was gathered for each of these workshops and demonstrates a very positive impact. For example, for one workshop carried out on Universal Credit and Disabled Claimants, 100% of attendees rated the training content and materials either 'excellent', or 'good'. Furthermore, 100% answered 'yes', or partly', to the question 'has the training increased your confidence in this subject area?'

Our Senior Welfare Advisor delivered 7 training sessions to local and national disability organisations in 2022/23.

In addition to the above, our legal aid team also delivered training sessions. Topics included housing adaptations, and care legislation in Wales. Finally, we also provided ad-hoc training sessions and one-off advice to staff at the MS Society relating to benefits, employment, discrimination and community care matters.

5.9. Volunteering

Volunteers are an important part of the DLS team and provide us with invaluable support that helps to improve the efficiency and reliability of our services. Volunteers undertake various tasks including updating fact sheets for service users, undertaking research and answering advice line calls and emails. We have a volunteer training programme in place to ensure they fully understand the organisation, their role, and the importance of confidentiality when dealing with client enquiries.

The recruitment and training of volunteers has been a fundamental part of the successful establishment and operation of the Welfare Advice Service, funded by the Three Guineas Trust. Two volunteers have received training and assisted in taking calls, providing basic advice and, where appropriate, setting up appointments for the specialist advisor to pick up the case. As a result, these volunteers have helped reduce waiting times for this service.

The MS Benefits Advice Service also works closely with volunteers. In the last year, 5 volunteers have given their time to support the service, primarily responding to client

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emails and phone calls. They also gave help preparing presentations and training materials. One volunteer came to us via the Kickstart scheme, whilst the others were recruited through the Pro Bono Community, charity which gives student volunteers some initial advice training and then finds them a placement for 6 months.

As part of our research into 'Ending charging for non-residential care for Disabled people', 3 volunteers from a major law firm helped to analyse the data from the FOI requests. Furthermore, 2 other volunteers contacted DLS during this time and were able to assist on other aspects of this research.

Volunteers also help across other DLS services. For example, one volunteer supported us in many activities, showing the rich set of experience they can obtain from working with DLS. She started assisting on the DLS free advice line, primarily responding to emails and chasing clients for outstanding documents. She then carried out research looking at potential organisations to partner with to develop our housing practice and drafted a paper on the effects of the increase in fuel charges on disabled households. Finally, she assisted our legal aid team's casework, for example, by taking attendance notes and contacting clients. We are delighted that this volunteer now works for us as a Paralegal.

5.10. Information and technology

Website and social media

DLS produces a range of easy-to-understand factsheets on legal issues relevant to Disabled people, together with template letters for commonly occurring situations. Most can be downloaded from DLS's website which also gives information on the charity, current issues of concern relevant to the legal rights of Disabled people and links to relevant sites of interest.

We are working continuously to improve the website to make it more accessible to our service users. Last year, we received a grant from the National Lottery's Awards for All scheme to enable us to further upgrade it. We began this work earlier this year, and a much more accessible draft website has been developed. It remains an area of high priority for us, and we will undertake further work on the website within the next 6 months.

Our Facebook page and Twitter accounts are also proving to be a rich source of shared information and mutual support between our users, and we make sure we upload relevant posts regularly.

WorkRights

We believe that technology can, where used appropriately, contribute to access to justice for Disabled people.

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Funded by the Legal Education Foundation, in September 2021 we launched a fully automated online advice platform called "WorkRights". It is a new digital guided pathway to increase the ways in which Disabled people can access advice. It covers reasonable adjustments in the workplace for Disabled people under the Equality Act. The platform uses a decision-tree or guided pathway (effectively, a kind of computerised flow diagram) and asks the user a series of questions. Depending on their answers, they will be taken through the guided pathway in different ways, receiving advice along the way. At the end they receive a summary of advice, and where appropriate, a draft letter to send to the user's employer asking for adjustments.

On average about 4-5 people a week are referred to our employment service through the WorkRights platform.

5.11. Partnerships in the community

The partnerships we have developed are key to our success. As previously mentioned, this last year we worked closely with the London Legal Support Trust to facilitate the Justice First Fellowship scheme at DLS. Our first Fellow went on to qualify and subsequently secured permanent employment at DLS. A second Justice First Fellow started in April 2023.

Where DLS is unable to provide advice or support clients, we signpost them to other organisations. In order to do this, we must first ensure we refer them to trustworthy, reliable organisations. We have worked hard to develop good working relationships with other advice-giving organisations for example the Citizens Advice Bureau.

We continue to work closely with Inclusion London and other Deaf and Disabled Persons Organisations (DDPOs) across London.

6. Risk review and change management

The board maintain a risk register, which identifies risks in the areas of workforce, service provision, regulatory risks, environmental risks, reputational risks, funding risks, legal work, health and safety risks, asset risks, financial risks, and management/governance risks. Each risk is assessed for probability (from 1 = very unlikely through to 5 = highly likely), and impact (from 1 = local impact on some operations, through to 5 = having a significant impact on DLS' ability to deliver strategic goals). This gives a gross risk. Existing controls are identified, together with further mitigating actions separately identified.

The main risk faced by DLS continues to be the potential cashflow problem caused by the delay in receiving payments from the Legal Aid Agency, both through slow processes and the fact that we are unable to claim funding until a case has been

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closed, which could be a matter of many months or even years. This remains a very live risk and we are seeking a resolution to it in conjunction with our main funders.

Trustees have continued to review risks on a regular basis and taken steps to mitigate them, both day-to-day and longer-term.

7. Future plans

When the new CEO, Mike Smith, commenced his role at DLS in February 2023, he undertook a review of the organisation against 11 quality assurance areas using the Trusted Standard Quality Assurance framework. Following this review, he identified key priority areas that need to be focused on to develop DLS into the “best in class”, not-for-profit organisation. This will be part of a two-year programme of work delivered in conjunction with the wider staff team.

7.1. Priority areas for development

We plan to carry out the following activities to ensure we remain a Centre of Excellence, capitalise upon staff expertise and maximise the impact we have for our Disabled clients:

- Spend six months consulting with the board, staff, clients and other key stakeholders to develop the framework for a new strategic plan. Following that, develop annual plans with specific objectives to move towards our newly agreed strategic plan
- Conduct an in-depth organisational review to improve communication and transparency with staff
- Explore ways of obtaining and maximising more user-feedback
- Develop a more holistic approach to recruiting and deploying volunteers
- Develop an organisation training and development framework
- Develop a pay setting policy which takes into account level of seniority, experience, and additional duties
- Alongside the strategic review, develop a fundraising strategy
- Identify and implement more effective IT and related systems, and then find the resources to make this happen
- Implement better procedures/training for supporting staff wellbeing and coping with emotionally challenging work
- Develop a communications strategy and action plan, and cost appropriate resources after the strategic plan and finance work
- Finish the redesign and implementation of the replacement website
- Be clearer around what impact we want to have, and what indicators we can use to assess that

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7.2. Triage function (integrated first line support)

DLS used to have a triage function, funded in part by Network for Social Change. Due to funding changes in the past, this function was effectively disbanded due to funding cuts and the reduction in volunteers during the pandemic. To keep our advice lines going they were split into the above mentioned different collection of short advice lines, which are staffed directly by frontline lawyers and benefits advisers.

In the coming year, we are planning to start a project using a short-term paralegal, a trainee solicitor, and a volunteer to try to establish elements of what would make a good triage function. We plan to develop this as a pilot to understand the complexities of the change process to move from the current range of alternative lines, to what we would need to do to skill up and deliver a proper, integrated, triage function. This will mean that clients:

- get an initial assessment of their legal and benefits issues and needs
- have the urgency of their issues prioritised
- get allocated the right advisers to deal with the right issues within the organisation, where we can help
- be signposted to appropriate alternative advice agencies, in a timely manner, where their issues fall outside the scope of our services (or we have excessive wait times)
- have to tell their initial story once only, with the relevant details then being captured within Advice Pro, our case management system (CMS)
- Clients will get a more seamless, joined up, relevant service

Qualified solicitors and advisers will spend more time doing more complex work which plays to their strengths, and more clients will have access to them. The organisation will have a much richer set of data to use for management information planning and future fundraising applications, arising from more sophisticated use of cloud-based phone systems and CMS enhancements.

7.3. Propel project

There is a dearth of free legal advice available to Deaf and Disabled people who are not eligible for legal aid. Many Disabled people do not know their rights, and many DPOs can reach people DLS can't but don't have the skills or capacity to address the issues. DLS is unique in providing a dedicated, pan-disability, free helpline but this is overwhelmed by the need and demand. At the same time the Addressing Skills Gap report shows not only the skills gap but also the need for more accessible and more holistic provision. It... 'recognises the need to develop clear pathways and a bridge between advice delivered as part of wider holistic approaches'. In order to create new pathways and more holistic settings we need to work with local partners to replicate this

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approach in the provision of other forms of legal advice. Equally importantly, there is a need for people in local DPOs to gain skills and take a lead in shaping the work. DLS has been successful in receiving funding from the Propel funding stream to train two new Social Welfare Solicitors and train and support generalist Advisors in local DPOs to offer Disabled people advice in a new, holistic model. Reaching new audiences, at an early stage and in accessible settings. It will develop a blueprint for wider replication with other DPOs.

7.4. New legal aid contracts

DLS recently bid for and achieved two new Legal Aid contracts in Discrimination and Public Law. We are currently working with staff in establishing the working framework and are gearing up to implement legal aid work in these two new areas in the coming months.

8. Board of Trustees

8.1. Overview

The Board of Trustees comprise 6 members at the year-end, 5 of whom are Disabled people and 1 the parent of a Disabled person. The Trustees are committed to maintaining a Board membership that comprises at least 75% Disabled people and to ensuring that at least 50% of paid staff, at all levels, are a Disabled person. This is in line with the requirements to be a DDPO. The Board is also committed to ensuring that the charity carries out its work in line with the requirements of the Social Model of Disability.

Trustees are also Directors of the Company. The Board considers that its primary role is to establish and monitor the strategic direction of the charity, ensure financial viability, adhere to the highest standards of governance and actively maintain its commitment to equal opportunities and combating discrimination.

The Board meet at least five times each calendar year. Trustees take decisions on all matters concerning governance, major strategic plans and finance planning and monitoring. Day to day operational matters, including staffing, work planning and finance are delegated to the Chief Executive.

Trustees are typically recruited via open advertisement with a view to filling gaps identified in an annual skills audit and maintaining a balanced and diverse group. They are appointed by the Board and receive a full induction programme.

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Trustees provide line management and supervision for the Chief Executive, led by the Chair of the Board.

8.2. Statement on Trustee responsibilities

The Trustees (who are also Directors of Disability Law Service for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that year. In preparing these financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in operation

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information included on the charitable company's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

The Trustees are members of the charity but this entitles them only to voting rights. The trustees have no beneficial interest in the charity.

The Trustees' annual report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime.

9. Financial review

9.1. Financial summary

Our income continues to be from a variety of sources including contract income from the Legal Aid Agency and the MS Society (for whom we delivered two contracts), a variety of grant giving organisations (some for specific projects and some toward core costs) and both corporate and individual giving.

Income in 2022-23 increased from £655,759 to £849,602. Expenditure increased from £668,893 to £716,166. This meant that the previous year's overall deficit of £13,134 was converted into an operating surplus of £133,436.

Total income for the year comprised restricted income of £250,211 and unrestricted income of £599,391. Unrestricted income should be recognised in full in the year that it was received. In practice a proportion of this relates to grants that cross the year end. The trustees do not consider it necessary or appropriate to designate those funds for next year's activities, but in practice they are mindful that the significantly increased unrestricted reserves need to be used cautiously.

By far the largest single item of expenditure was the total cost of employment, at £581,285. This reflected a moderate pay rise given during the year. The second highest cost was premises, followed by consultancy and HR costs.

A reasonable level of reserves is required given that there is a considerable time lag in receiving payment for work carried out under our Legal Aid contracts, with claims for payment on Legal help cases only able to be made once the file has been finally closed. We are taking further steps to ensure that our billing procedures are such that claims are submitted as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The following table shows the movement on reserves. It is noteworthy that work in progress more than doubled during the year. In general, we rarely get challenged on our legal aid billing and have high recovery rates. We have however made a precautionary provision for bad debt in case we don't get full recovery.

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2022/23 Reserves	Reserves B/F	Movement	Reserves C/F
Total Reserves	260,080	133,436	393,516
Restricted reserves	2,949	7,070	10,019
WIP - designated	74,702	81,913	156,615
Capital - designated	4,294	1,050	5,344
General free reserves	178,135	43,403	221,538

9.2. Reserves policy

The Trustees aim to hold a minimum of three months operating costs in unrestricted reserves and have set a target of 4 to 6 months. At the end of 2022-23 total unrestricted reserves (designated and free) of £383,497 represents 6.4 months of total expenditure.

However, a significant proportion of these are in the form of Work in Progress, meaning that the funds are not available for use yet. This largely represents the cost of delivering work incurred before we receive payment for it. These are therefore shown as a designated fund. Looking at the remaining General free reserves, these represent 3.7 months of total expenditure.

The Board reviews its reserves policy annually to ensure there is a realistic and practical reserve to protect against the immediate impact of possible reductions in funding.

9.3. Remuneration policy

Remuneration of all staff, including key management personnel, is reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees, taking into account current market rates and affordability. In the year the board agreed a 5% rise, with an additional payment to recognise the significant increases in the cost of living, that was made to all staff in December 2022. During the current year the board are working with the staff team to develop a new organisational structure and pay and compensation policy.

9.4. Information on fundraising practices

Disability Law Service's fundraising strategy is to focus on trusts, foundations and partnerships with other disability organisations. There have been no fundraising events or fundraising campaigns around individual giving or community fundraising. We have yet again been able to raise some funds from London Marathon after the gap due to the pandemic. We spent £5,621 on fundraising costs which was more than offset by the revenue generated from individual donations.

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DLS is aware of the need for particular care to be taken when seeking funds from potentially vulnerable donors and does not seek donations from its clients.

The trustees' annual report has been approved by the trustees on 20 February 2024 and signed on their behalf by

Vijay Samtani

Trustee

Independent examiner's report

To the trustees of

Disability Law Service

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of Disability Law Service for the year ended 31 May 2023

This report is made solely to the trustees as a body, in accordance with the Charities Act 2011. My examination has been undertaken so that I might state to the trustees those matters I am required to state to them in an independent examiner's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, I do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charity and the trustees as a body, for my examination, for this report, or for the opinions I have formed.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the Company, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 ('the 2006 Act').

Having satisfied myself that the accounts of the Company are not required to be audited under Part 16 of the 2006 Act and are eligible for independent examination, I report in respect of my examination of the Company's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Charities Act 2011 ('the 2011 Act').

Independent examiner's statement

Since the Company's gross income exceeded £250,000 your examiner must be a member of a body listed in section 145 of the 2011 Act. I confirm that I am qualified to undertake the examination because I am a member of the Institute of Chartered Accounts in England and Wales, which is one of the listed bodies.

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

- 1 Accounting records were not kept in respect of the Company as required by section 386 of the 2006 Act or
- 2 The accounts do not accord with those records; or
- 3 The accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements of section 396 of the 2006 Act other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair view' which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination; or
- 4 The accounts have not been prepared in accordance with the methods and principles of the Statement of Recommended Practice for accounting and reporting by charities.

Independent examiner's report

To the trustees of

Disability Law Service

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Name: Fleur Holden FCA

The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales

Address: Sayer Vincent LLP, 110 Golden Lane, London, EC1Y 0TL

Date: 27 February 2024

Disability Law Service

Statement of Financial Activities *(incorporating an income and expenditure account)*

For the year ended 31 May 2023

	Note	Restricted £	Unrestricted £	2023 Total £	2022 Total £
Income from:					
Donations	3	79,725	185,578	265,303	186,412
Charitable activities					
Legal advice and casework	4	170,486	413,813	584,299	469,068
Sundry income		–	–	–	279
Total income		250,211	599,391	849,602	655,759
Expenditure on:					
Raising funds		–	21,442	21,442	20,155
Charitable activities					
Legal advice and casework		249,342	445,382	694,724	648,738
Total expenditure	5	249,342	466,824	716,166	668,893
Net income/(expenditure) for the year	6	869	132,567	133,436	(13,134)
Transfers between funds		6,201	(6,201)	–	–
Net movement on funds		7,070	126,366	133,437	(13,134)
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		2,949	257,131	260,080	273,214
Total funds carried forward		10,019	383,497	393,516	260,080

All of the above results are derived from continuing activities. There were no other recognised gains or losses other than those stated above. Movements in funds are disclosed in Note 13 to the financial statements.

Disability Law Service

Balance sheet

Company no. 1408520

As at 31 May 2023

	Note	£	2023 £	2022 £
Tangible fixed assets	9		5,345	4,295
Current assets				
Debtors	10	195,456		92,323
Work in progress		156,615		74,702
Cash at bank and in hand		102,853		138,753
		454,924		305,778
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	11	66,753		49,993
Net current assets			388,171	255,785
Net assets	12		393,516	260,080
Funds				
Restricted funds			10,019	2,949
Unrestricted funds				
Capital fund			5,344	4,294
WIP fund			156,615	74,702
General funds			221,538	178,135
Total funds	13		393,516	260,080

Audit exemption statement

For the financial year ended 31 May 2023, the charitable company was entitled to exemption under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

The Trustees acknowledge their responsibilities for:

- Confirming that the members have not required the charitable company to obtain an audit in accordance with section 476; and
- Complying with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 with respect to accounting records and the preparation of accounts.

The Trustees confirm that these accounts have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime.

Approved by the Trustees on 20 February 2024 and signed on their behalf by

Vijay Samtani
Trustee

Disability Law Service

Statement of cash flows

For the year ended 31 May 2023

	2023 £	2022 £
Cash flows used in operating activities	(30,549)	(80,611)
Cash flows from investing activities		
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	(5,350)	(1,193)
Net cash used in investing activities	(5,350)	(1,193)
Change in cash and cash equivalents in the year		
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year	138,753	220,558
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	102,853	138,753

Note to the cashflow statement

Reconciliation of net movement in funds to Net cash flow from operating activities

Net movement in funds	133,437	(13,134)
Depreciation charges	4,300	3,693
(Increase) in debtors	(103,133)	(66,323)
(Increase)/decrease in work in progress	(81,913)	10,016
Increase / (decrease) in creditors	16,760	(14,863)
Net cash (used in) operating activities	(30,549)	(80,611)

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2023

1 Accounting policies

a) Statutory information

Disability Law Service is a charitable company limited by guarantee and is incorporated in England & Wales.

The registered office address and principal place of business is The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR.

b) Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) – (Charities SORP FRS 102), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (September 2015) and the Companies Act 2006.

Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy or note.

In applying the financial reporting framework, the trustees have made a number of subjective judgements, for example in respect of significant accounting estimates. Estimates and judgements are continually evaluated and are based on historical experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances. The nature of the estimation means the actual outcomes could differ from those estimates. Any significant estimates and judgements affecting these financial statements are detailed within the relevant accounting policy below.

c) Public benefit entity

The charitable company meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102.

d) Going concern

The Trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern.

The Trustees do not consider that there are any sources of estimation uncertainty at the reporting date that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next reporting period.

e) Interest receivable

Interest on funds held on deposit is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably by the charity; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the bank.

f) Voluntary income

Voluntary income is received by way of donations and gifts and is included in full in the statement of financial activities when receivable. Unsolicited donations and gifts are included as donations and similar incoming resources. All income received from the London Marathon sponsorship is credited to voluntary income.

g) Revenue grants

Revenue grants are credited to the statement of financial activities when received or receivable whichever is earlier, unless they relate to a specific future period, in which case they are deferred. All revenue grants relate to legal advice and casework.

h) Contractual income

Contractual income is recognised when earned.

i) Restricted funds

Restricted funds are to be used for specific purposes as laid down by the donor. Expenditure which meets these criteria is charged to the fund.

j) Designated funds

Designated funds are unrestricted funds earmarked by the Trustees for particular purposes.

k) Unrestricted funds

Unrestricted funds are donations and other incoming resources received or generated for the charitable purposes.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2023

1 Accounting policies (continued)

l) Staff costs

Staff costs are allocated to activities on the basis of the estimated staff time spent on those activities:

▪ Fundraising and publicity	2.5%
▪ Legal advice and casework	97.5%

m) Expenditure

All expenditure is accounted for on an accruals basis and has been classified under headings that aggregate all costs related to the category. Resources expended include attributable VAT which cannot be recovered. Where non-staff costs cannot be directly attributed to particular headings they have been allocated to activities on the following basis, which is based on the estimate of consumption:

	Fundraising & publicity	Legal advice & casework	Governance
Telephone, premises, printing, postage, stationery	2.5%	94.5%	3.0%
Other costs	0%	100%	0%

n) Governance costs

Governance costs relate to the costs of running the charitable company such as the costs of Trustee meetings, independent examination and statutory compliance.

o) Depreciation

Depreciation is provided on all tangible fixed assets at rates calculated to write off the cost of each asset evenly over its expected useful life. The depreciation rates in use are as follows:

▪ Fixtures, fittings and office equipment	20%
▪ Computer equipment	33%
▪ Website costs	20%

Depreciation costs are allocated to activities on the basis of the use of the related assets in those activities. The minimum capitalisation limit is £100.

p) WIP

Income is recognised on casework earned and due ("work in progress" or "WIP") according to the time booked on the matter multiplied by the relevant legal aid or interpartes rate. Appropriate provision is made for irrecoverable WIP.

q) Debtors

Trade and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any trade discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

r) Cash at bank and in hand

Cash at bank and cash in hand includes cash and short term highly liquid investments with a short maturity of three months or less from the date of acquisition or opening of the deposit or similar account.

s) Operating leases

Rentals payable under operating leases, where substantially all the risks and rewards of ownership remain with the lessor, are charged to the statement of financial activities on a straight line basis over the minimum lease term.

t) Creditors and provisions

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

u) Pension scheme

The charitable company operates a defined contribution pension scheme for its employees. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the charitable company in independently administered funds. The pension cost charge represents contributions payable under the scheme by the charitable company to the fund. The charitable company has no liability under the scheme other than for the payment of those contributions.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2023

2 Detailed comparatives for the statement of financial activities for 2022/23

	2022 Restricted £	2022 Unrestricted £	2022 Total £
Income from:			
Donations	23,750	162,662	186,412
Charitable activities			
Legal advice and casework	193,392	275,677	469,068
Sundry income	-	279	279
Total income	217,142	438,618	655,759
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds	-	20,155	20,155
<i>Charitable activities</i>			
Legal advice and casework	257,838	390,900	648,738
Total expenditure	257,838	411,055	668,893
Net income/(expenditure) for the year	(40,696)	27,563	(13,134)
Transfers between funds	289	(289)	-
Net movement on funds	(40,407)	27,274	(13,134)
Reconciliation of funds:			
Total funds brought forward	43,356	229,857	273,213
Total funds carried forward	2,949	257,131	260,080

3 Donations

	2023 Restricted £	2023 Unrestricted £	2023 Total £	2022 Total £
Donations from individuals	-	19,132	19,132	16,770
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	-	63,250	63,250	50,000
Henry Smith Charity	-	-	-	15,000
Linklaters LLP	-	45,000	45,000	40,000
AB Charitable Trust	-	20,000	20,000	15,000
Access to Justice Foundation	52,500	12,196	64,696	-
City Bridge Trust	18,750	-	18,750	23,750
London Legal Support Trust	-	10,000	10,000	10,000
London School of Economics	-	-	-	3,000
Souter Trust	-	-	-	2,000
Truemark Trust	-	-	-	6,000
Trust for London	-	-	-	4,392
Woodroffe Benton Foundation	-	1,000	1,000	-
Jefcoate Trust	-	5,000	5,000	-
CAF	-	10,000	10,000	-
National Lottery	8,475	-	8,475	-
Marsh Christian Trust	-	-	-	500
Total	79,725	185,578	265,303	186,412

In 2022, £23,750 of donations income was restricted. The remainder (£162,662) was unrestricted.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2023

4a Legal advice and casework

	Restricted £	Unrestricted £	2023 Total £
<i>Grant Income:</i>			
Trust for London	45,713	–	45,713
MS Society	–	135,540	135,540
Three Guineas Trust	92,000	–	92,000
LEF – Justice First Fellowship	30,579	–	30,579
ATW	2,194	–	2,194
<i>Other Income:</i>			
Legal Help and Legal Aid	–	278,273	278,273
	<u>170,486</u>	<u>413,813</u>	<u>584,299</u>

4b Legal advice and casework (prior year)

	Restricted £	Unrestricted £	2022 Total £
<i>Grant Income:</i>			
Trust for London	52,750	–	52,750
MS Society	–	140,534	140,534
Three Guineas Trust	92,000	–	92,000
LEF – Justice First Fellowship	42,077	–	42,077
Kickstart	6,565	–	6,565
<i>Other Income:</i>			
Legal Help and Legal Aid	–	135,142	135,142
	<u>193,392</u>	<u>275,677</u>	<u>469,068</u>

Disability Law Service

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2023

5a Total expenditure (current year)

	Fundraising & publicity £	Legal advice & casework £	2023 £	2022 £
Staff costs (Note 7)	14,532	566,753	581,285	549,814
Legal aid, legal help and other disbursements	–	16,343	16,343	4,324
Subscriptions	–	10,319	10,319	7,452
Depreciation	–	4,300	4,300	3,693
Solicitors' practising certificates	–	2,668	2,668	–
Professional indemnity insurance	–	6,528	6,528	6,001
Consultancy and HR expenses	–	3,932	3,932	22,836
Staff expenses	–	4,803	4,803	6,198
Telephone	182	7,099	7,281	6,516
Premises costs	792	30,874	31,666	33,555
Printing, postage and stationery	63	2,470	2,533	11,141
Accountancy	104	4,060	4,164	–
Recruitment and training	–	19,029	19,029	2,969
Other costs	–	9,786	9,786	801
Fundraising costs	5,621	–	5,621	4,826
Governance costs:				
Independent examination	78	3,023	3,100	3,336
Other governance costs	70	2,739	2,809	5,431
Total expenditure	21,442	694,724	716,166	668,893

Disability Law Service

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2023

5b Total expenditure (prior year)

	Fundraising & publicity £	Legal advice & casework £	2022 £
Staff costs (Note 7)	13,745	536,069	549,814
Legal aid, legal help and other disbursements	–	4,324	4,324
Subscriptions	–	7,452	7,452
Depreciation	–	3,693	3,693
Professional indemnity insurance	–	6,001	6,001
Consultancy and HR expenses	–	22,836	22,836
Staff expenses	–	6,198	6,198
Telephone	168	6,348	6,516
Premises costs	865	32,690	33,555
Printing, postage and stationery	287	10,854	11,141
Recruitment and training	–	2,969	2,969
Other costs	–	801	801
Fundraising costs	4,826	–	4,826
Governance costs:			
Independent examination	101	3,235	3,336
Other governance costs	163	5,268	5,431
Total expenditure	20,155	648,738	668,893

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2023

6 Net incoming / (expenditure)

This is stated after charging:

	2023 £	2022 £
Depreciation	4,300	3,693
Independent examiner's remuneration	3,250	3,100
	<u>7,550</u>	<u>6,793</u>

7 Staff costs and numbers

Staff costs were as follows:

	2023 £	2022 £
Salaries and wages	515,498	489,470
Social security costs	49,871	44,897
Pension costs	15,916	15,447
	<u>581,285</u>	<u>549,814</u>

No employee earned more than £60,000 (excluding employer pension and national insurance costs) during the year (2022: None).

The average number of employees during the year on a head count basis was as follows:

	2023 No.	2022 No.
Legal advice and casework	<u>15</u>	<u>15</u>

Key management personnel are considered to be the Trustees of the charity, who receive no remuneration, together with the CEO. Total remuneration, including employer's national insurance contributions and employer's pension costs for the CEO (which is also the total remuneration for the key management personnel) during the year amounted to £51,985 (2022: £57,438).

8 Taxation

The charitable company is exempt from corporation tax as all its income is charitable and is applied for charitable purposes.

9 Tangible fixed assets

	Office equipment, fixtures & fittings £	Computer equipment £	Total £
Cost			
At 1 June 2022	4,713	24,367	29,080
Additions in year	–	5,350	5,350
At 31 May 2023	4,713	29,717	34,430
Depreciation			
At 1 June 2022	2,601	22,184	24,785
Charge for the year	–	4,300	4,300
At 31 May 2023	2,601	26,484	29,085
Net book value at 31 May 2023	2,113	3,234	5,345
Net book value at 31 May 2022	2,113	2,183	4,295

All tangible fixed assets are used for direct charitable purposes.

10 Debtors

	2023 £	2022 £
Trade debtors	174,754	60,870
Prepayments & other debtors	2,715	–
Accrued income	17,988	31,453
Work in Progress	156,615	74,702
	352,071	167,025

11 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	2023 £	2022 £
Taxation and social security	13,129	13,508
Pensions	10,667	7,401
VAT	6,906	9,084
Accruals	13,535	11,673
Other creditors	22,516	8,327
	66,753	49,993

12a Analysis of net assets between funds (current year)

	Restricted funds £	Designated funds £	General funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	5,345	–	5,345
Current assets	10,019	156,614	221,538	388,171
Net assets at 31 May 2023	10,019	161,959	221,538	393,516

12b Analysis of net assets between funds (prior year)

	Restricted funds £	Designated funds £	General funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	4,295	–	4,295
Current assets	2,949	74,702	178,135	255,786
Net assets at 31 May 2022	2,949	78,997	178,135	260,080

13a Movements in funds (current year)

	At 1 June 2022 £	Income £	Expenditure £	Transfers between funds £	At 31 May 2023 £
Restricted funds:					
Legal Education Foundation	2,949	22,579	(25,661)	133	–
Legal Education Foundation JFF	–	8,000	(8,000)	–	–
City Bridge	–	18,750	(18,750)	–	–
Access to Justice Foundation	–	52,500	(47,856)	–	4,644
ATW	–	2,194	(1,861)	(333)	–
National Lottery	–	8,475	(2,400)	(700)	5,375
Trust for London	–	45,713	(52,813)	7,101	–
Three Guineas Trust	–	92,000	(92,000)	–	–
Total restricted funds	2,949	250,211	(249,342)	6,201	10,019
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated capital	4,294	–	(4,300)	5,350	5,344
Designated WIP	74,702	–	–	81,913	156,615
General funds	178,135	599,392	(462,525)	(93,464)	221,538
Total unrestricted funds	257,131	599,392	(466,824)	(6,201)	383,497
Total funds	260,080	849,603	(716,166)	–	393,516

13b Movements in funds (prior year)

	At 1 June 2021 £	Income £	Expenditure £	Transfers between funds £	At 31 May 2022 £
Restricted funds:					
Trust for London	248	52,750	(53,100)	102	-
Legal Education Foundation	30,024	-	(27,075)	-	2,949
Legal Education Foundation JFF	13,084	42,077	(55,348)	187	-
City Bridge	-	23,750	(23,750)	-	-
Kickstart	-	6,565	(6,565)	-	-
Three Guineas Trust	-	92,000	(92,000)	-	-
Total restricted funds	43,356	217,142	(257,838)	289	2,949
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated capital	6,794	-	(3,693)	1,193	4,294
Designated WIP	84,718	-	-	(10,016)	74,702
General funds	138,345	438,618	(407,362)	8,534	178,135
Total unrestricted funds	229,857	438,618	(411,055)	(289)	257,131
Total funds	273,214	655,759	(668,893)	-	260,080

Purposes of restricted fundsLegal Education Foundation

These grants are to enable the employment of a trainee solicitor under the Justice First Fellowship scheme.

Three Guineas Trust

This grant is to provide a welfare benefits advice service including outreach.

City Bridge Trust

The grant is to support that element of DLS' work that directly benefits Londoners.

Movements in funds (continued)

Access to Justice Foundation

This grant is for improving and sustaining access to early legal advice and support, sustaining partnerships and networks, and delivering services based on user needs including digital and remote delivery.

Access to Work

This represents funding from the Department for Work and Pensions to reimburse DLS for the costs of making reasonable adjustments for disabled employees.

National Lottery

This grant is towards the development of a new and more accessible website.

Trust for London

This grant is for specialist legal advice and assistance for disabled Londoners experiencing discrimination, threats and insecurity in the workplace and to support them in obtaining and retaining employment.

Purposes of designated funds

Capital Fund

This fund represents the future depreciation of unrestricted tangible fixed assets held at the year end.

Transfers

Transfers from unrestricted funds are to correct designated fund balance.

14 Related party transactions

There are no related party transactions to disclose for 2023 (2022: none).

There are no donations from related parties which are outside the normal course of business and no restricted donations from related parties.