



Greater Manchester Law Centre

**The restoration of
fully funded legal aid**

**A supportive social
security system**

MANIFESTO

**The next generation of
social welfare lawyers**

**Everyone's right
to a secure home**

**An end to the hostile
environment for claimants
and migrants**

We are fighting together
for free access to justice



We have a vision of a fairer society. **Every one of us has a part to play.**

We will not stand silently by and watch this attack on our communities.

We aim to bring together those who share our views. **If you agree, we welcome you to join us.**

Join us in fighting for:

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We are **fighting together** with others **for free access to justice**

We need Law Centres

After a decade-long attack on the most vulnerable members of our community, the politics of austerity and nationalism have led to homelessness, racism, discrimination, exploitation and division in our communities.

The Government has deliberately created a hostile environment for the most vulnerable people in our society. Legal reforms have reduced the rights of workers, decimated the welfare system and turned housing into an investment opportunity, rather than a basic right for all. The Windrush scandal exposed the deep and calculated cruelty at the heart of government immigration policies. Meanwhile, cuts to local council funding and legal aid have deprived communities of the resources to fight back against these injustices.

People should not have to rely on charities and food banks to survive. Despite this, these organisations are currently being overwhelmed with the rising demand.



GMLC's story featured in Proof magazine in 2017: "How to build your own law centre".



Law Centres can

☞ Assist individuals in reversing unlawful decisions and enforcing their legal rights.

☞ Identify systemic failures that need to be challenged through strategic litigation and policy work.

☞ Campaign with other like-minded individuals and organisations for change.

Over **600**
Greater Manchester
Law Centre (GMLC)
volunteers:

- Provide front-of-house legal advice, advocacy and representation.
- Organise fundraising, research, our social media presence, publicity and campaigning.

We began with the commitment to challenge inequality and injustice. We called on like-minded individuals and organisations to join us.

Our community Law Centre started without funding, staff or premises.

We got volunteers, found offices, sought money (especially individual donations) and created a friendly safe space where we would always be ready to listen. **Together we raised awareness of the lack of legal advice and representation in Greater Manchester for those in need.** We worked with universities, lawyers, campaign organisations, unions and others, particularly the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit.

In two years GMLC reclaimed
£1.5 million
in benefits which the DWP
wrongly refused people.

That's £1.5 million brought into the local economy, without funding given to GMLC by councils or other statutory bodies.



We provide face-to-face advice rather than retreating behind the disengaged phone or internet communication portrayed in the film

1. DANIEL BLAKE



Fighting [campaigning starts

with the people who visit our community law centre. Our aim is to be a voice for change for the individuals we work with. We fight to change the unjust policies that bring them to us in the first place.

together [we work with others

to end homelessness, to create a supportive social security system and to scrap Universal Credit. Together with other organisations, who suffered from the cuts, we will win more resources for all. We will not leave the most vulnerable groups in society competing for the crumbs of a dwindling welfare state.

for free access

[we offer walk in, face to face, independent, high quality legal advice and representation for all in need

While we currently provide pro bono volunteer advice, we don't believe this lets the government off the hook. Instead, we demand fully funded legal aid and the development of a new generation of welfare lawyers who will be paid for their work.

Advice alone is not enough. We also campaign for the system and the laws to be changed. What is needed is access

to justice [We need you to join us in this fight.

North West England



2011-2018 provision of legal aid by private and non-profit providers: **halved**



2011-2018 funding for non-profit providers **reduced by more than three quarters**

Access to legal advice, representation and advocacy:

- ☞ Empowers people
- ☞ Reduces homelessness and poverty
- ☞ Challenges the hostile environment against claimants and migrants
- ☞ Enforces people's rights
- ☞ Prevents inequality and exclusion

We demand the restoration of legal aid

Cuts to Legal Aid mean that more people struggling with problems such as benefit, housing and employment issues cannot access the legal advice and representation they need. There used to be nine Law Centres in Greater Manchester. By 2015 just two remained. The people who are most in need are the ones least able to find or afford a lawyer.

This is why we set up the Greater Manchester Law Centre to fight together for free access to justice.

This is why we campaign for a fully funded legal aid system which will take its rightful place alongside publicly funded and accountable health, social security, transport and housing services.

“We live in a society which does not value the vulnerable. Those who are in need of help are targeted by government policies. Those who advise them have their funding removed.

Access to justice is a vital tool for empowering individuals to challenge the position the government put them in.”

GMLC volunteer Alex McColl

We fight for a supportive social security system

“The whole approach puts pressure on you to feel shit about yourself, to feel shit about everything.

You want to feel good about yourself and not talk about the bad stuff... Why should we have to be humiliated when we try to explain what we're capable of?”

Welfare claimant speaking about the process of obtaining their benefit entitlement.

A decent society should protect and support its most vulnerable members. A just welfare system is vital in ensuring that illness, family and caring responsibilities, low pay or unemployment will not plunge people into desperate situations of poverty, debt or homelessness. We believe everyone has the right to live with dignity, regardless of their personal circumstances.

Independent legal advice and representation

Legal advice and representation for welfare rights is vital in ensuring that everyone is able to hold the government to account for the decisions it makes.

It's essential that people affected by welfare reform can make a strong case for entitlement when claiming their benefits, and that **they're supported when wrongfully denied benefits in order to challenge that decision.**

“My experience of DLA to PIP changeover has been very stressful. I had never attended a tribunal before, the environment was most intimidating. I'm very glad I had your support and guidance.”

Welfare claimant

In our first two years we recovered £1.5 million for people wrongly denied benefits.

Access to legal advice and representation empowered these people to prove decision makers wrong.

This shows the power of access to justice, and this shows that claimants are forced to fight unnecessary and gruelling battles in order to get what they deserve from a hostile welfare system.

Being a voice for individuals, the community and campaigns

We are committed to challenging the stigmatisation of benefit claimants as lazy, feckless frauds who need to be sanctioned, threatened, frightened and punished back into work.

Our experience enables us to demonstrate how welfare cuts have exacerbated poverty and exclusion, to back up our demands for reform, and to document and publicise the devastating impact that welfare cuts have had on individuals and communities in Greater Manchester.

Nationally only

9

people granted legal aid for welfare benefit cases during 2017/2018.

We fight for the next generation of social welfare lawyers

To effectively restore legal aid, we must develop and retain legal expertise in social welfare law. Without social welfare lawyers, people won't have access to the legal system to challenge the adverse decisions.

We will not allow legal aid cuts to be the death of the social welfare lawyer

We want GMLC to be a home for passionate law students, advisers, activists and social welfare lawyers. Together we commit to using the law to fight for social justice to be kept alive.

Many students enter legal education driven by a passion for social justice, but leave believing that a career in commercial or corporate law is the only viable option.

Legal education is increasingly narrow in focus, with few opportunities to study social welfare law. **Legal Aid cuts have reduced the opportunities for students to gain experience in social welfare law, let alone obtain future paid training and employment.**



"Law students everywhere should be encouraged to support their local law centre and LASP is a great example of this."

LASP student
Edmund Potts



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LASP students went on to receive pupillage; a highly competitive professional training stage for barristers.

We are committed to providing students with opportunities to develop experience in and commitment to social welfare law.

We run a Legal Advocacy Support Project (LASP) with both of Manchester's law schools. LASP provides students with a six-month supervised placement as welfare rights advisers.

Several LASP students were inspired to continue working at GMLC as advisers, campaigners and volunteers. We have also been able to host a Justice First Fellowship Trainee Solicitor, providing the supervision and experience required for her to become a fully qualified social welfare lawyer.

GMLC's LASP project with Manchester law schools:



FINALISTS

Manchester Legal Awards
Pro Bono and Community
Initiative Award 2019

LawWorks and Attorney
General's Pro Bono Awards
for Best Contribution by
a Team of Students

At the heart of almost all housing policy are key questions; is housing a human right and social good, or is it a commodity? Is housing for people or for profit?

There needs to be a legal right to a secure home for all, and these housing rights must be enforceable.

We fight for everyone's right to a secure home

Recent years have seen rising and extortionate rents, decreasing provision of social housing and an inhumane disregard for the safety and security of homes.

Housing rights and homelessness are also linked to benefit cuts and sanctions, the Bedroom Tax, the disastrous Universal Credit rollout, loss of employment and unreliable zero hour contracts.

We are now witnessing an emergent and diverse grassroots housing movement, bringing together campaigners, organisers, tenants, politicians, lawyers and academics, who are making ever louder demands to make accessible, affordable, habitable, safe and secure housing a right for all.



GMLC is proud to be part of that movement

We demand the protection of renters' rights

We have acted for people who've been served with Section 21 notices, meaning they can be evicted without having done anything wrong.

One young woman faced eviction after complaining to the Council about the disrepair her landlord had failed to fix for many years. This shows how poor renters' security causes an inability to enforce housing rights.

We fight with others to change housing law and policy.

50,000

signatures on a petition to abolish Section 21. Greater Manchester Law Centre supported this campaign with other housing groups.



We demand an end to homelessness

Ending homeless must happen through societal and policy change to address its causes. It's crucial that homeless people are listened to as part of creating a solution.

Some of the homeless people we represent have appealed to authorities for assistance, and find

themselves offered something wholly unsuitable. Some sought assistance, only to be wrongly turned away. Some don't even know where to start. This is not good enough when legal duties are owed to many people sleeping on the streets.

With others, we demand that housing rights are protected, and resources must be available to provide the assistance that is needed.

"Gatekeeping":

Councils turn people away without accepting a homelessness application or offering accommodation and assistance.

We demand safe and secure public housing

Access to council housing – that is, public housing, publicly funded and owned, and rented to local people – has been almost eradicated.

Council housing has been widely privatised and councils have failed to build more housing for people in need.

We are guided by the principle that everyone has a right to a secure home.

To ensure this, there needs to be enough publicly funded housing available. **Quite simply: more houses need to be built.**

Fighting for public housing includes advocating for safe and secure housing

The failure to protect tenants, including those in social housing, was tragically highlighted by the Grenfell Tower fire.

In response, we urge local authorities and landlords to take action and keep the public informed on safety matters. Here we are supported by our volunteers who researched cladding and high-rise safety in Greater Manchester.



40%

of former council housing is now known to be privately rented.

The Government in Scotland and Wales have ended the Right to Buy scheme. Pressure is building for the devolved Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to argue for this.



In February 2018 we marched for justice for those who died, alongside Grenfell Estate residents, Manchester Fire Brigade Union, North West Unison, Unite the Union, North West TUC, local housing campaign groups and Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham.

We demand an end to the hostile environment for claimants and migrants

A Sierra Leone national born in the late 1950s had lived in the UK continuously since 1970 when he arrived as a child.

He had worked and then received benefits until 2016, when his benefits were stopped because he was deemed to have no status in

the UK. The DWP had been told by the Home Office that he had 'no leave to remain' in this country. He had had no contact with the Home Office since his arrival, so they had no records of his existence on their system. Crucially they would have had no proof of his entry to the UK as his landing card would have been destroyed by the Home Office in 2010, as a result of

their own policy. The Home Office did not contact him at any stage to find out about his history.

He then received a decision from the DWP seeking to recover all benefits paid to him since 2009, which totaled over £30,000.

As a result of this decision he had no income or accommodation from April 2016.

EMPIRE WINDRUSH

The Windrush scandal exposed the hostile environment

The Immigration Act 2014 led to policies designed to stop immigrants renting property in the UK, driving, having bank accounts and accessing benefits and free healthcare.

It included measures to increase data-sharing between other government departments or external organisations and the Home Office, and the requirement for document checks

by those providing certain services. **Essentially it turned all public services into immigration police.**

This resulted in people who had been in the UK for decades, who had worked, had children and grandchildren in the UK, being refused access to benefits, medical treatment, employment. In some cases, people were detained and deported to the countries they had left as children.

How our local community is affected

When the Windrush scandal unfolded, people from the local community were able to come to GMLC for information and advice. Together, we campaigned against the consequences. **We supported local campaigns and worked directly with the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit to offer specific advice.** The two organisations jointly submitted policy advice to local MPs and the government. **The hostile environment had created fear within communities.** It was only when the Windrush scandal broke

that people came forward who had been avoiding accessing services because of this fear. **One person avoided going to the doctor** even when she was ill because she was afraid, she would be charged for healthcare. **Another, who was well past retirement age, was taking low paid cleaning jobs rather than claim the benefits she was entitled to,** as she'd been told the benefits

office would tell the Home Office, who would deport her. **One person** had been living with friends as **he'd been told**



neither a landlord nor the council would rent to him as he had no current status documents.

All these people were elderly and should have been looking forward to a quiet and

enjoyable retirement rather than being worried about their status in the UK.

Since they have been able to raise their issues, all of these individuals have now received confirmation of their status in

the UK. However, this does not compensate for the culture of fear the hostile environment policy created within black communities. **We will fight for all of them to be granted compensation.**

Racism is used to divide and rule. Half a century of discriminatory immigration laws have reinforced this.

Pitted against each other: Indian vs West Indian

African vs Australian 'good' (often white) migrants vs 'bad' migrants 'benefit scroungers' vs 'bogus immigrants'

The scandal affecting the Windrush generation, highlighted by Guardian journalist Amelia Gentleman and the Morning Star, remains appalling. **We seek to support all those affected.** Unusually in immigration, the public is on our side. Unfortunately, this is only the tip of the iceberg of poor Home Office decisions.

The Government still will not accept the connection between their hostile environment policy and the mistreatment of the Windrush generation.

We demand Justice

We want justice for this generation, which means legal aid now, and compensation for all those threatened or removed. The scandal is not over. We continue to provide information, respond to Government consultations and demand compensation.

The hostile environment against migrants and against benefit claimants must end.

It's time for a complete change of government policy. We need the restoration of legal aid, an end to benefit sanctions and exorbitant health charges for migrants, the right to a secure home for all, and justice for all those who have been deprived and/or deported.

No one 'is' illegal.

We are committed to campaigning with organisations that share our core principles.

We are fighting together with others for free access to justice

We recognise that it's only through collective action we can achieve real change.

We work with individuals and challenge the system which produces the hardships they face in the first place. To do this, we must work with others.

By the community, for the community.

We fight alongside trade unions, campaigners and advocacy groups



GMLC celebrating the 150th anniversary of the TUC at the Mechanics Institute

These groups share our view that change is needed. The campaign to establish a Law Centre was supported by the trade union movement. We are proud to work alongside them. Strong union organisation allows people to demand their rights, meaning fewer people need recourse to the

law. Unfortunately, the current temporary and casual nature of employment makes it easy for employers to keep unions away and inhibit the ability of workers to build strong workplace organisations that guarantee rights.

We work with community groups, in particular those run by and for those most affected by injustice, to empower and advocate for their members.

With these groups we help to share and strengthen campaigns, and to provide practical legal face to face advice, representation and support for their members.

Our campaign against Universal Credit related evictions brought disabled rights groups and tenants' groups together over the issues of welfare and housing rights.

These groups issued a joint statement with GMLC, each giving their own members' reasons for condemning the hostile benefits system and the impact of the Universal Credit rollout.

Together, we carried out a day of action in Manchester city centre with a static demonstration, chalking demands on the floor and delivering an open letter to Manchester City Council. The campaign garnered support from the press and local politicians.



“We stand in solidarity with other organisations who are rightly campaigning to protect disabled people from being evicted.”

Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People, speaking at our day of action against Universal Credit evictions

We work with other lawyers and advice organisations to launch strategic legal challenges to injustice

Our multifaceted work with others includes the partnership between GMLC and the **Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU)**, who

provide free legal advice and representation. We share our offices with GMIAU's housing support service for people seeking asylum. **This means we have a direct referral**

route for people who come to us for immigration advice, which proved invaluable for those caught up in the Windrush scandal.



“Use campaigns to support you as much as you support them. If there’s an issue you feel strong about, think, ‘can we use the law?’”

Campaigning solicitor Rebekah Carrier speaking on Strategic Litigation and the role of law centres at GMLC's AGM.

We fight alongside others for the restoration of Legal Aid and changes to housing policy and the benefits system.

We ask you to join us in that fight.



Call for action

Join the fight

FOR law centres



TO ENFORCE the legal rights of individuals and campaign with others for change

FOR equality and justice



BY DEMANDING the restoration of legal aid, to take its place alongside fully funded health, social security, transport and housing services

FOR a supportive social security system



BY DEMANDING an end to the stigmatisation of benefit claimants, the vicious sanctions regime and swingeing cuts

BY DEMANDING the restoration of legal aid for welfare benefits

FOR the next generation of social welfare lawyers



BY SUPPORTING schemes to develop and retain legal expertise within social welfare law

BY CHALLENGING that commercial or corporate law are the only options for students

FOR everyone's right to a secure home



BY DEMANDING the abolition of Section 21 and no-fault evictions

BY DEMANDING an end to homelessness

BY DEMANDING safe and secure public housing

BY DEMANDING housing as a legal human right

FOR an end to the hostile environment and escalating racism



BY REJECTING the division incited by half a century of discriminatory immigration laws

BY DEMANDING adequate compensation for those affected by the Windrush scandal

FOR strong, collaborative campaigns to achieve this



BY WORKING with community groups and campaigning organisations to mount strategic legal challenges to injustice

by fighting together

How to get involved

We all have a part to play. Join us and help us fight for free access to justice.

Become a member

Our members help shape the agenda of our organisation and we're grateful for all their support.

Volunteer

Volunteers are the backbone of the law centre. Go against the grain and join the fight for free access to justice by volunteering with the services, campaign or fundraising teams at GMLC.

Ask your organisation, community group or trade union to sponsor us or make a donation

Donations and standing orders are vital for us to continue to provide free face-to-face advice and representation services, and to support our campaign work. Show your commitment to free access to justice by encouraging your networks to get involved.

If you are a lawyer or work in the legal profession, ask your firm to follow the lead of Allison Law Solicitors and make a regular donation to our work.

Fundraise

Organise sponsored events or fundraisers to support our work. We offer publicity via our digital platforms and advice on how to promote your efforts.

Work & campaign with us, and please donate

Lobby and campaign

From the very beginning, we have been more than a Law Centre. We are also a campaign organisation for free access to justice. Use your influence to put free access to justice on the agenda. Other organisations and unions are invited to affiliate with us.

Invite a speaker from GMLC to your organisation, community group or trade union

We know that it is only through collective action that we can achieve real change. If your group or campaign shares our principles and we can work together, get in touch.

- www.gmlaw.org.uk/donate/
- www.gmlaw.org.uk/get-involved/
- development@gmlaw.org.uk





Greater Manchester Law Centre

Fighting together for
free access to justice

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