

# Business Plan

October 2021 – September 2024

*youth* legal  
& resource centre

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Who we are

Youth Legal is an independent charity based in Wandsworth, assisting marginalised and vulnerable young people across the London area.

Youth Legal facilitates young people's access to justice through high quality young person-friendly legal advice, support and education.

Our specialist legal advice is focussed on fighting for children and young people to be safe and secure, with appropriate housing and care.

## 1.2 What we do

*We advise and represent* – standing up for young people's rights through the provision of high quality young person-friendly legal advice and holistic support.

*We support and empower* – giving young people the knowledge and skills to manage their problems and providing expert 2<sup>nd</sup> tier support to youth professionals.

*We campaign and influence* – fighting for change through strategic litigation and acting as an exemplar delivery model.

*We listen and engage* – enabling young people to hold ourselves and others to account.

## 1.3 Why we exist

The transition to adulthood is one of the most difficult and confusing times in the lives of many young people, leading to a myriad of complex problems requiring support. Unfortunately, the very statutory services set up to support young people too often fail to respect or uphold their rights.

Young people aged 16-25 experience 5 million civil legal problems each year.<sup>1</sup> Yet they often lack awareness of their rights and don't expect mainstream legal services to take them seriously. Only 3% of young people with legal problems find their way to a lawyer, while 42% self-help or obtain no support.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, vulnerable young people often experience a range of poor outcomes, from poverty, mental ill-health and homelessness to exploitation, violence and involvement in crime.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Travesty of Justice: young people's access to legal aid*, Youth Access, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Youth Legal was set up to provide specialist young person-focused legal advice and assistance, and to educate and empower young people to manage their future legal problems.

## **1.4 Our story**

In 2011, a group of committed lawyers and community activists in South London set up a steering committee with the aim of establishing a new service to support young people.

In 2012, with funding from the London Legal Support Trust, a feasibility study found overwhelming need for a special legal advice for young people and the first Conference of the Young People's Legal and Resource Centre was adopted.

In 2013 the organisation became a registered Charity and obtained Charitable Incorporated Organisation status. A grant from the London Legal Support Trust enabled us to start giving free legal advice in housing and community care.

In 2014 we were awarded a Legal Aid contract in Community Care and Valerie Clark, our founding Director, moved into our first office in Wandsworth.

In 2018 we were awarded a Legal Aid Contract in Housing, together with a grant from Trust for London, enabling us to appoint our first Housing Solicitor. That year, we held our first annual Young People's Legal Rights Conference.

Over the last few years, we have added Debt (in 2019) and Immigration (in 2021) to our offer.

We became a London Legal Support Trust Centre of Excellence in 2019, became authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority in 2020 and were registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner in 2021.

We now have a team of seven expert and experienced staff, providing casework in the areas of Housing, Community Care, Debt, Welfare Benefits and Immigration across the London area.

In 2020/21 our turnover was £220,896 and we opened 137 new cases. Many of our cases involve complex casework and judicial review challenges.

We have developed fast in the last few years and are now at a point in our development where we wish to solidify the foundations upon which we were built whilst seeking to extend our help to more young people.

Our staff have worked in partnership with our Trustees and our vibrant Youth Advisory Board to develop this strategy. We believe our future success, service improvement and organisational development all depend on continuing to develop our partnership with young people by giving them greater influence over the decisions the charity takes.

## **1.5 Legal status**

Youth Legal and Resource Centre is a registered Charity (No: 1151052), with Charitable Incorporated Organisation status.

## ***1.6 How we developed this plan***

Our new strategy and business plan have been developed through an intense 6 month process of collaboration between our staff, Trustees and young people. This process was facilitated by James Kenrick, our Strategic Development Consultant, and involved:

- Individual interviews with all staff and most Trustees to identify key insights and questions for further exploration.
- A series of strategy sessions at staff meetings, Board meetings and Youth Advisory Board meetings.
- The establishment of a Strategy Working Group, comprising representatives from the staff team, the Board of Trustees and the Youth Advisory Board. This group met three times in August and September 2021.
- Consultation on the draft plan.

As the plan has been developed at a time of extreme uncertainty, amidst a pandemic, we recognise that it will need to remain flexible.

## **2. VISION, MISSION, VALUES**

### ***2.1 Our Vision***

All young people have their rights respected, can secure equal access to justice and achieve a successful transition to adulthood.

### ***2.2 Our Mission***

Youth Legal works to bring lasting change to the lives of marginalised and vulnerable young people by providing easy access to young person-friendly social welfare lawyers and advisers offering high quality, holistic support and legal education.

### ***2.3 Our Values and ways of working***

Youth Legal's six *core values* are as follows:

***Rights-based*** – all our work is rooted in young people's legal and human rights

***Expert*** – all our advisers are highly experienced, skilled and qualified to provide legal advice specifically to young people

***Compassionate*** – we listen to young people, take them seriously and care about them and their futures

***Committed*** – we go the extra mile to ensure our clients secure justice

**Inclusive** – we prioritise those in greatest need and work to redress inequality

**Collaborative** – our staff, Trustees and Youth Advisory Board work closely together, and we partner with many other organisations to meet young people’s needs

#### Ways of working

We developed our services and working practices by listening to young people. We keep listening and remain forever flexible and tenacious, fighting for our clients’ rights. We aim for our services to be:

**Young person-friendly** – young people receive a holistic and flexible service in a confidential, informal, non-judgemental environment

**Accessible** – we offer a variety of access routes to free, independent advice delivered on young people’s terms

**Empowering** – we aim to equip young people with the knowledge, skills and awareness they need to prevent and manage their legal problems

**High quality** – our legal advice is quality assured, meets regulatory standards and consistently achieves excellent outcomes for our clients

**Strategic** – we achieve change for young people more widely through our strategic litigation and policy work

### **3. STRATEGIC AIMS & OBJECTIVES**

We have set **four key strategic aims** for the period October 2021- September 2024, together with **allied objectives**:

#### ***Strategic Aim 1: Cement Youth Legal’s reputation for expertise in Community Care and Homelessness casework with vulnerable young people***

##### *Objectives:*

- a) Maintain legal expertise re Community Care & Housing (e.g. through CPD of caseworkers; recruitment; providing 2<sup>nd</sup> tier advice).
- b) Develop a casework strategy to clarify priority case types and referral partners
- c) Focus on vulnerable client groups, particularly: care leavers, young migrants, homeless YP, YP with disabilities, young carers, YP with mental health difficulties.
- d) Identify opportunities to undertake strategic litigation aimed at securing changes to legislation, policy, procedures and bad practices, with a focus on housing and care for young people in care and care leavers.
- e) Enhance staff skills and expertise in working with young people (e.g. through training/skills exchange for staff; delivering training for other legal advice organisations) and comms.
- f) Explore the scope to develop our 2<sup>nd</sup> tier advice role supporting youth professionals, with a focus on our core areas of expertise.

## ***Strategic Aim 2: Develop young people's access to age-appropriate specialist legal advice***

### ***Objectives:***

- a) Continue to improve remote pathways to Youth Legal's advice, particularly for young people seeking our help as the first point of contact.
- b) Further develop our infrastructure and capacity to deliver online advice services.
- c) Re-open our advice centre for face-to-face advice when Covid safety allows.
- d) Build on existing partnerships with referral organisations across London, focussing on: Youth homelessness orgs, young migrant orgs, lawyer networks, social services, MH services (incl. youth advice and counselling services, social prescribing/primary care, CAMHS), Youth Offending (incl. probation, youth courts); schools/FE colleges; youth centres (incl. Regenerate); food banks; JobCentre Plus.
- e) Carefully test partnership-working outside London with a youth advice agency.
- f) Fill gaps in provision where we can, prioritising areas where unmet need can be evidenced.
- g) Continue to develop our holistic model by exploring ways of improving mental health support for our clients.
- h) Target our Know Your Rights legal education work to drive access to our advice services.
- i) Raise the profile and awareness of Youth Legal's services, e.g. via better use of social media, a regular newsletter, and review of branding.

## ***Strategic Aim 3: Ensure young people's voices are central to everything we do, drive service improvement and play an increased influence in Youth Legal's decision-making***

### ***Objectives:***

- a) Seek resources to increase our capacity to provide high quality support to the Youth Advisory Board to enable it to play an influential role in the development of our services, strategies, projects and comms.
- b) Maintain a minimum quota of two young Trustees on the charity's main Board, with links to the Youth Advisory Board.
- c) Conduct a robust, youth-led needs assessment to inform service developments and ensure our services are meeting emerging needs.
- d) Review feedback and outcomes monitoring procedures and ensure data on young people's service experiences drive service improvements.
- e) Review the audience for our annual Young People's Legal Rights conference and consider improving the participation of young people in the design and delivery of the event.
- f) Seek resources to support a shift from staff-led policy work to youth-led campaigning (whilst still contributing to sector-wide policy work and campaigns re young people's access to justice).
- g) Refresh our volunteer and placement strategy.

## ***Strategic Aim 4: Strengthen our foundations and governance to maintain Youth Legal as a robust and stable organisation***

### ***Objectives:***

- a) Increase effectiveness of the charity's decision-making processes (e.g. through reviewing the structure of Board and staff meetings; and increasing joint-working between Trustees, staff and young people).

- b) Review core policies & systems, incl. finance, risk management, equality & diversity, anti-racism and staff wellbeing.
- c) Increase the charity's sustainability and capacity to sustain core activities (e.g. through seeking to increase long-term core and unrestricted funding; building unrestricted reserves in line with reserves policy; building our case for investment; developing a 'succession plan' for key personnel).
- d) Review and develop our Trustee recruitment, induction and training processes.

## 4. THE CHANGE WE SEEK TO MAKE

Our key intended **outcomes** are:

- Young people have better access to high quality legal advice when they need it.
- Young people are better educated and empowered through knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.
- Children and young people's rights are better respected and upheld by those in positions of power – particularly in relation to housing and social care.
- Law, policy & practice are improved to prevent young people's common legal problems from recurring.

We record hard case outcomes for clients and employ a self-assessment questionnaire to monitor improvements in clients':

- levels of stress
- understanding of rights
- ability to deal with problems
- knowledge of where to get help
- feelings about their future
- engagement in education / training /employment
- confidence
- control over their life
- safety

## 5. THE PROBLEM WE'RE ADDRESSING

### ***5.1 Young people experience lots of advice problems***

Young adults under the age of 25 in England and Wales experience around 5 million civil legal problems in a typical year.<sup>3</sup> Compared to other age groups, young adults are particularly likely to experience social welfare problems relating to rented housing, homelessness, welfare benefits, debt, and discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

Problem incidence rises rapidly with age throughout the young adult years, with older young adults (22-24 year olds) more likely to experience advice problems than the general adult population.

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<sup>3</sup> Calculations by Youth Access based on data from the Ministry of Justice's 2014-15 Legal Problem Resolution Survey, reported in *A Travesty of Justice: young people's access to legal aid*, Youth Access, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> *The Advice Needs of Young People – The Evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access, 2009.

The vast majority of young adults' legal problems are experienced by young people with self-reported disadvantages or vulnerabilities, such as being a lone parent, a young carer, a care leaver, a victim of crime or a young migrant; having mental health problems; or being socially isolated or not in education, employment or training.

Vulnerable young people tend to report multiple problems and problems of greater severity, often with high impact on levels of stress and wellbeing.<sup>5</sup>

## **5.2 Statutory Services too often fail to respect and uphold young people's rights**

Young people are frequently turned away by local authorities as a result of gatekeeping of housing and Children's services provisions.

Young people, in particular those aged 16-17, do not have the legal capability to challenge such gatekeeping, although they will often perceive it to be unfair. They may feel it is just another example of adults letting them down; that there is no worthwhile support available for them.

There can be a tendency on the part of local authorities to categorise young people as the "deserving" and "undeserving", with the former group being denied provision on the basis of their difficult backgrounds; the fact they don't present as obviously vulnerable or immediately likeable; or because their circumstances are deemed as "their own fault".

## **5.3 Young people rarely access high quality advice**

The most recent data available suggests that more than three-quarters of young people with legal problems are left to resolve their problems without any help from a professional adviser or lawyer.<sup>6</sup>

There is a considerable body of evidence demonstrating that young people rarely access advice services established for the general population, such as Citizens Advice and Law Centres. They are less likely to seek advice and, when they do, are more likely to fail to access advice.<sup>7</sup>

In 2019/20, young people aged 16-24 made up just 5.7% of all local Citizens Advice clients nationally despite comprising 11% of the population and having advice needs at a similar level to the general population. This figure was even lower across London, at 4.4%.

Research has also found that young people were disproportionately impacted by legal aid cuts in the last decade. Only 16% of young people's legal problems remained in scope of legal aid post-LASPO. Ministry of Justice data shows that fewer than 3% of young people still eligible for civil legal aid found their way to a lawyer, while 42% either self-helped or obtained no support whatsoever. The impact of the civil legal aid cuts has been greatest on vulnerable groups of young people.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Civil Legal Problems: Young People, Social Exclusion and Crime*, Pleasence, P., Youth Access, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> *A Travesty of Justice: young people's access to legal aid*, Youth Access, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> *Young People's Access to Advice – The Evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> *A Travesty of Justice: young people's access to legal aid*, Youth Access, 2018.

## **5.4 Young people know little about their rights, advice services or ‘the system’**

Young people often lack the critical knowledge of rights necessary to deal with their social welfare problems and their awareness of structures for advice and the existence of local advice services that could help them is low, rendering them less likely to take action to resolve their problems.

Key reasons that young people fail to seek advice from mainstream adult advice services include:<sup>9</sup>

- difficulties identifying that they have a rights-related problem that requires advice;<sup>10</sup>
- not knowing when or where to seek help;<sup>11</sup>
- misconceptions about what services actually do;
- not thinking that advice would make any difference to the outcome;
- feeling that they won't be listened to or will have their problems trivialised by adult professionals;
- concerns about confidentiality;
- a lack of confidence and persistence.

Research<sup>12</sup> has also identified a range of psychological factors that play a highly significant role in young people failing to get advice, including:

- finding problems too stressful to sort out;
- disaffection with the legal system (including feeling that the system is there to punish rather than protect young people);
- a sense of powerlessness to resolve their problems;
- being scared of the consequences if they complain.

## **5.5 Mainstream adult advice services are not seen as accessible by young people**

Young people have articulated their negative views about mainstream adult advice services in a manifesto entitled ‘Make Our Rights Reality’.<sup>13</sup> They say they don't expect to be taken seriously because of their age and are put off by “all the waiting around”. Young people often

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<sup>9</sup> *Young People's Access to Advice – The Evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Youth Access' analysis of data from the MOJ's 2014-15 Legal Problem Resolution Survey found that whilst 24% of people aged 25 or older recognised their problem as 'legal' – a known key predictor of effective problem resolution strategies – this figure fell to 15% among 18-24 year olds; and to just 6% among young people who were still eligible for legal aid on financial grounds. (A Travesty of Justice: young people's access to legal aid, Youth Access, 2018.)

<sup>11</sup> 18-24 year olds in the MOJ's 2014-15 Legal Problem Resolution Survey were far less likely than older respondents to identify sources of legal help and were twice as likely to suggest they did not know where to seek help. For example, while 43% of those aged 25 or older suggested Citizens Advice Bureaux and 38% suggested lawyers, these figures dropped to just 14% and 13% respectively for those aged 18-24. (A Travesty of Justice: young people's access to legal aid, Youth Access, 2018.)

<sup>12</sup> *Young People's Access to Advice – The Evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> *Make Our Rights Reality: A manifesto created by hundreds of young people across England*, JustRights/Youth Access, 2014.

perceive legal advisers to be judgmental, bureaucratic, unable to relate to them and difficult to understand.

Young people can lack the confidence, persistence, communication skills and know-how needed to resolve problems without active age-appropriate assistance. Building trust between client and adviser is the key to effective advice work with young people. Positive early experiences of the advice process are critical to keeping young people engaged.

Advising young people tends to take longer than advising adults if you want to get good results. Many young clients will need help for additional inter-related emotional, practical, personal or health issues.<sup>14</sup>

## **5.6 The coronavirus pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on young people**

Over the last decade, the incidence of young people's legal problems has increased and overtaken that of people aged 25 and over,<sup>15</sup> reflecting the disproportionate impact of the 2007-2008 financial crisis and subsequent austerity on young people, their prospects and the services established to support them.

The coronavirus pandemic has compounded existing inequalities, with widespread predictions of a negative long-term health, economic and social legacy on young people in the UK. For example:

- The Centre for Mental Health predicts that 1.5 million children and young people will need either new or additional mental health support as a direct consequence of the crisis.<sup>16</sup>
- The Resolution Foundation has reported that youth unemployment is on course to more than triple to its highest level since the early 1980s.<sup>17</sup>

We know from research that there is a strong relationship between youth unemployment, youth mental health and young people's legal advice needs.<sup>18</sup> It is virtually inevitable, therefore, that there will be growing numbers of young people in need of high quality advice over the next few years.

Advice services reported a significant increase in the number of young clients coming to them in the first 6 months following the start of the pandemic (Apr-Sept 2020), notably relating to Housing problems and Employment problems.<sup>19</sup>

Young people with the greatest legal needs are more likely to be digitally excluded and, therefore, to have been shut out from services that have restricted face-to-face access since the start of the pandemic.

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<sup>14</sup> Opening your doors to young people: Practical guidelines for making advice services young person-friendly. Youth Access

<sup>15</sup> *A Travesty of Justice: young people's access to legal aid*, Youth Access, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> *Covid-19 and the nation's mental health: Forecasting needs and risks in the UK*, The Centre for Mental Health, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> *An intergenerational audit for the UK 2020*, The Resolution Foundation, October 2020.

<sup>18</sup> *The Social Determinants of Young People's Mental Health*, Youth Access, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> I. Edge and J. Kenrick, 'Under the radar: the pandemic's impact on young people's social welfare needs' <https://atjf.org.uk/guest-blog-under-the-radar-the-pandemics-impact-on-young-peoples-social-welfare-needs>

## 6. OUR NICHE

Youth Legal has a clear niche in providing easy access for young adults to youth-friendly social welfare lawyers and advisers providing holistic young person-focussed support. Our specialist legal advice is focussed on fighting for children and young people to be properly housed and cared for.

Most legal advice providers see few young people and lack skills in working with young people. Youth Legal is unique in providing youth-focussed housing advice and representation under a legal aid contract.

Very few youth sector providers possess legal advice skills or capacity.

Just for Kids Law is the main other agency in England providing similar services to us. We believe our expertise in homelessness, community care and money advice complements Just for Kids Law's primary focus on crime and education. We have good links with Just for Kids Law, and we wish to strengthen this relationship at different organisational levels in order to clarify our respective roles, referral relationship and partnership working on policy and campaigns.

## 7. CONTEXT FOR OUR NEW STRATEGY

### ***7.1 What we've achieved over the last 3 years***

Key achievements in the past three years have included:

- Awarded Housing legal aid contract, supplementing our Community Care contract (2018)
- Established the Young People's Legal Rights Conference as a popular annual event (2018)
- Developed our Know Your Rights work by creating remote training for young people and their support workers in grassroots organisations.
- Increased our income from Legal Aid
- Expanded from one member of staff to seven
- Became a London Legal Support Trust Centre of Excellence (2019)
- Maintained our Lexcel accreditation
- Became authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority and commenced providing advice on Money, Debt and Welfare Benefits (2020)
- Registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner and commenced immigration advice (2021)
- Recruited and appointed two young Trustees (2021)
- Established our Youth Advisory Board (2021)

In 2020/21:

- We assisted 137 clients across Housing, Community Care and Debt/Money advice – most involving in-depth legal casework.
- We closed 88 cases with good outcomes in Housing, Community Care and Debt/Money advice.

- We took 10 judicial review cases to the High Court for our clients and 10 Housing cases to the County and Appeals Court.
- 63% of our clients were young people between the ages of 16 and 25, with the other 37% being destitute children and their families.
- 94% of our clients were from racially minoritised communities.

## 7.2 SWOT analysis

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of advice</li> <li>• Expertise and reputation re Community Care &amp; Housing</li> <li>• Excellent referral relationships with youth housing and migrant agencies in London</li> <li>• Reaching very vulnerable clients</li> <li>• Staff team – legal experience and knowledge, commitment to young people’s rights</li> <li>• Active and supportive Board of Trustees</li> <li>• Organisational culture – collaborative, supportive, transparent, democratic</li> <li>• Vibrant Youth Advisory Board</li> <li>• Effective joint-working across staff, Trustees and young people</li> <li>• Support from key legal sector funders</li> <li>• Comprehensive office manual</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Legal’s profile and awareness of services amongst young people are low</li> <li>• Lack of finance, admin, comms, policy capacity</li> <li>• Lack of long-term, core and unrestricted funding</li> <li>• Lack of capacity to support Youth Advisory Board and volunteering</li> <li>• Data (e.g. client feedback and outcomes) not used sufficiently to inform service development</li> <li>• Lack of recent evidence of need</li> <li>• Current office is not conducive to social distancing</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very few other specialist legal services for young people across England</li> <li>• Scope to develop strategic and referral relationships</li> <li>• Scope to extend 2<sup>nd</sup> tier role</li> <li>• Potential to develop expertise in working with young people and share with legal advice sector</li> <li>• Sharper focus re Know Your Rights, strategic litigation</li> <li>• Potential to tap into youth sector funding</li> <li>• Scope to improve remote pathways to our services</li> <li>• Increase wrap-around support</li> <li>• Sharpen purpose and audience for Know Your Rights work and conference</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pandemic may lead to increased needs but reduced resources</li> <li>• Our rapid recent development makes us vulnerable in event of loss of funding</li> <li>• Government policy re legal aid and young people is not progressive</li> <li>• Loss of key personnel, e.g. due to retirement, illness, burn-out, lack of progression opportunities</li> <li>• Inability to recruit</li> <li>• Further cuts to Legal Aid</li> </ul>

## 7.3 The changing environment in which we work

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

**The coronavirus pandemic** has affected all areas of our lives, compounded inequalities facing YP and changed the way legal advice services deliver their services. Predictions of increases in youth poverty, homelessness, mental ill-health and legal problems are already being realised.

**The instability caused by Brexit** continues, with a continuing lack of clarity about the overall legal framework for children and young people.

**Austerity**, which is likely to be extended as a result of the pandemic and Brexit, is increasingly leading to gatekeeping and denial of rights by local authorities and other public services upon which young people rely for their support and protection. In addition, the funding climate for legal advice charities continues to deteriorate. NCVO has reported there will be an overall contraction of income for the voluntary sector in comparison to where the sector was pre-covid.<sup>20</sup>

**The evolution of digital technology** is presenting new challenges for young people and charities alike. We need to be adept at utilising technology to deliver our services and to communicate with a range of stakeholders. Yet we also need to ensure young people who are digitally excluded are still able to access our services.

**The youth mental health crisis** is not only affecting our clients' wellbeing, but also increasing their legal needs, which, in turn, impact on mental health. We need to ensure our clients are able to access mental health support when they need it and that our services are accessible to young people already receiving mental health support.

**The overall impact** of these phenomena on the work of Youth Legal is that there are more young people who require legal advice, but fewer services for them to turn to. Remaining services such as Youth Legal are in danger of becoming overwhelmed by demand without the resources to respond. This raises the risk of burn-out for staff at a time when there is a shortage of new talent entering an ageing legal advice sector.

## 8. OUR ADVICE SERVICES

Our youth-friendly lawyers and caseworkers offer legal advice and representation to help young people

- understand their rights
- sort out problems with money and benefits, housing, homelessness and immigration
- obtain support from social services if you are a care leaver, need to be in care or if you have disabilities

We regularly take cases to the High Court and to the County and Appeals Court. However, the majority of our cases settle through negotiation encouraged by the prospect of a court hearing, which is less stressful for our clients and avoids the interminable wait for a court decision.

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<sup>20</sup> *Respond, recover, reset: the voluntary sector and COVID-19*, NCVO, 2021

## **8.1 Who we help**

Our priority is to help young people and young adults (aged up to 25) who need advice in their own right, independently from parents or carers. Many of our clients are care leavers, young migrants or young carers, or are experiencing long-term health issues or disabilities.

We also advise some families with children who are facing destitution or homelessness, or where their child/young person requires social care/support. Whilst our clients in these cases may be parents or other adults, we are clear that our primary aim is to safeguard the rights of the child. Many of these clients have No Recourse to Public Funds, meaning they cannot access mainstream housing, welfare benefits and employment.

In 2020/21, 63% of our clients were young people between the ages of 16 and 25, with the other 37% being destitute families with children. 94% of our clients were from racially minoritised communities. 41% identified as women and 50% as men (the remainder did not specify).

**Over the period 2021-24**, we wish to focus our support on young people seeking advice in their own right as far as is possible whilst operating within the constraints of our legal aid contracts. We will continue to campaign for the creation of a 'Young People's Law' legal aid category in order to facilitate the development of a network of specialist legal services able to meet young people's needs holistically.

## **8.2 Where we help**

Whilst we started as a local service, providing advice in Wandsworth, we currently accept referrals from across the London region and, occasionally, from outside London.

Since March 2020 we have been unable to offer drop in services from our office in Putney, due to the Coronavirus pandemic although we still see some clients by appointment in person where this is necessary. For the past 18 months, we have mainly been providing advice remotely.

In 2020/21, 89% of our clients were from London boroughs and 11% from outside London.

**Over the period 2021-24**, we will resume drop in sessions from our office once it is safe to do so, and will continue to develop our remote provision. Given our mission to improve young people's access to advice, the success of our remote provision and the almost complete absence of legal services for young people in other parts of the country, there may be a case for extending our services outside London. Indeed, young people on our Youth Advisory Board have been urging us to do so. In response, we wish to explore a partnership with a suitable local organisation in one other area of England in order to assess need and test out service delivery.

## **8.3 Principal areas of legal work**

COMMUNITY CARE

Advice and representation to help young people who are care leavers, need to be in care or have disabilities, and their families, obtain support from social services.

#### HOUSING

Assistance for young people facing homelessness, possession proceedings / eviction and other problems with landlords.

#### DEBT AND MONEY ADVICE

Advice on credit debts, rent arrears, council tax arrears, utility bill arrears, available debt solutions and income maximisation, to get young people's finances back into shape and provide them with the confidence to manage their finances in the future.

#### WELFARE BENEFITS

Basic, non-specialist advice on welfare benefits issues relating to disability, employment support allowance, housing benefit and rights of residence in relation to our Housing and Community Care cases. If specialist advice is required, we refer out.

#### IMMIGRATION

In 2021 we initiated a new immigration advice service, with seed-corn funding from the London Borough of Wandsworth. We provide legal advice for young people and families with children who do not have leave to remain, or need to obtain settled status or apply for British nationality. We aim to regularise young migrants' immigration status so that they can resettle in safety and rebuild their lives.

**Over the period 2021-24**, we would like to cement our reputation for specialist expertise in the areas of Community Care and Housing advice for young people by seeking opportunities to extend our capacity in these areas and to deepen and broaden our knowledge and skills across the team.

We wish to maintain and develop our services in Debt/Money, Welfare Benefits and Immigration; and to add further areas of law to our offer where we have compelling evidence of unmet need.

We will develop a casework strategy specifying the types of cases and clients we will prioritise to meet the aims of our overall strategy. The casework strategy will also help us focus the development of our referral relationships, Know Your Rights work and social media content. However, whilst clarifying our priorities, we do not wish to exclude young people from accessing our services at a time when there are few others they can access.

### **8.4 2<sup>nd</sup> tier advice**

We provide ad hoc advice by telephone, webchat and email, as well as training, to youth professionals from our referral agencies in relation to all areas of law we cover.

In the last three years, we have trained 30 youth professionals and provided over 300 instances of 2<sup>nd</sup> tier advice and assistance.

**Over the period 2021-24**, we will seek opportunities to extend our 2<sup>nd</sup> tier role, as we believe it could support our efforts to: increase access to our services; identify strategic litigation cases; develop partnerships; develop a leadership role in the youth and legal sectors; and enhance our profile and reputation. In particular, we will explore the feasibility of

developing an advertised 2nd tier telephone advice service for youth professionals in Community Care and Housing.

## **8.5 Strategic litigation**

We undertake strategic casework with the aim of changing law and practice for young people beyond those we can assist through individual casework.

Over the last three years, we have won a number of important cases for children and young people, setting legal precedents through our strategic litigation. One example is our successful challenge to a local authority's practice of refusing assistance to destitute families due to the council's false accusations of parents lying about their finances. Many children were suffering from the lack of provision of services from Children's Services. Since we won the case against the council, the problem has become rare and the case is now used in training sessions.

**Over the period 2021-2024**, we intend to focus our strategic casework in Community Care and Housing. This means we will be seeking to identify cases that could be brought to trial that would change the law in this area in order to ensure young people, in particular care leavers, are accommodated in suitable accommodation and do not become homeless at 21. Our work will also ensure that Children's Services are providing the level of care to those in their care that they are duty bound to provide as corporate parents.

## **8.6 Access to our advice services**

We provide advice and casework in person, and remotely by telephone, video, email and webchat.

Since March 2020, our provision of face-to-face advice has been restricted as a result of the pandemic. Although we made a rapid and successful switch to remote delivery methods at the start of the pandemic, we recognise that our services are not as accessible as they were previously.

Whilst we aim to provide drop in services from our Putney office as soon as it is safe to do so, the premises are small, making social distancing difficult with our expanded staff team, and are not easily accessible to young people who do not live locally.

We have found that the development of our remote delivery methods, partly by necessity, has opened up opportunities to reach more young people from a wider geographical area.

On the issue of online delivery, we note the conclusions of The Westminster Commission on Legal Aid's 'Inquiry Into The Sustainability And Recovery Of The Legal Aid Sector' (October 2021):

*"Online legal services should not be seen as a replacement for traditional face-to-face services, especially when such a high proportion of those who qualify for legal aid do not always have reliable access to digital technology. That said .... there is a significant opportunity to use technology to both expand the capacity of providers and to extend the reach of legal aid providers to more people. The Government should support legal aid providers to upgrade their digital infrastructures. This should include helping smaller providers and Not-for-Profits procure the necessary hardware and case management*

*software that could help them expand their capacity.... Expanding the availability and accessibility of online advice by legal aid providers, particularly at an early stage, could serve to both enhance existing face-to-face services and extend the reach of providers.”<sup>21</sup>*

**Over the period 2021-2024**, one of our 4 key strategic aims is to develop young people's access to young person-friendly specialist legal advice. Planned activities include:

- Continue to improve remote pathways to Youth Legal's advice, particularly for young people seeking our help as the first point of contact.
- Further develop our infrastructure and capacity to deliver online advice services.
- Re-open our advice centre for face-to-face advice when Covid safety allows.
- Continually review the suitability of our premises and whether we may need a more accessible space for young people from across the London area.
- Build on existing partnerships with referral organisations across London, focusing on: youth homelessness agencies, young migrant agencies, lawyer networks, social services, mental health services (incl. youth advice and counselling services, social prescribing/primary care, CAMHS), Youth Offending (incl. probation, youth courts); schools/FE colleges; youth centres (incl. Regenerate); food banks; JobCentre Plus.
- Carefully test partnership-working outside London with a youth advice agency.
- Fill gaps in provision where we can, prioritising areas where unmet need can be evidenced.
- Continue to develop our holistic model by exploring ways of improving mental health support for our clients.
- Target our Know Your Rights legal education work to drive access to our advice services.
- Raise profile and awareness of Youth Legal's services, e.g. via better use of social media, regular newsletter, review of branding.

## **8.7 Fees for our advice services**

Currently, we do not charge any fees for our advice services.

**Over the period 2021-2024**, there may be opportunities for us to earn unrestricted income from the provision of immigration advice that is not available under Legal Aid – an area that suffers from a severe shortage of specialist advisors. We will carefully assess the pros and cons of such a move, taking account of our existing ethos and values.

## **8.8 Quality, regulation and professional associations**

Our team of lawyers and caseworkers has many years of experience working in Law Centres and other independent legal advice agencies and is committed to delivering high quality advice and client care.

Youth Legal's solicitors are regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (597030).

We are accredited under The Law Society's Lexcel legal practice Quality Mark for client care, compliance and practice management.

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<sup>21</sup> [https://lapg.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Westminster-Commission-on-Legal-Aid\\_WEB.pdf](https://lapg.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Westminster-Commission-on-Legal-Aid_WEB.pdf)

We also hold legal aid contracts with the Legal Aid Agency in Housing and Community Care.

We are authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority (FRN 843404) in order to support young people around debt and money advice.

We are registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner to provide level 3 Asylum and Protection and Immigration work.

We are members of several professional associations, including: AdviceUK, the network of independent advice services; Youth Access, the recognised body for youth advice and counselling services; Legal Aid Practitioners Group; Housing Law Practitioners Association; and Immigration Law Practitioners Association.

As a registered Charity (No: 1151052), we comply with legal requirements set down by the Charity Commission.

#### Casework supervision

Youth Legal actively supervises all casework staff in compliance with Legal Aid Agency and Lexcel requirements. Supervisors are responsible for the quality of the work produced by the staff they supervise and for developing the skills and knowledge of these staff. Amongst other quality processes, they monitor casework on a day to day basis, hold individual supervision sessions and carry out file reviews. Further details are set out in our Office Manual.

## **9. OUR OTHER ACTIVITIES**

### ***9.1 Public legal education***

We deliver Know Your Rights legal education sessions to young people through our partner referral agencies, and we publish information on young people's rights.

In the past three years, this has included delivering sessions on:

- ✓ care leavers' rights
- ✓ disabled children's rights
- ✓ homelessness and housing rights, including rights and responsibilities of being a tenant
- ✓ financial capability and budgeting

We have also published Know Your Rights leaflets on:

- ✓ homelessness
- ✓ young carers' rights
- ✓ police stop and search
- ✓ starting a social enterprise

Through the process of developing this strategy, we found broad agreement that our Know Your Rights work is core to everything we do, but we currently have limited capacity in the team to deliver it in the way we would like.

**Over the period 2021-2024**, we will seek opportunities to develop the quality and quantity of our Know Your Rights work, focussing on delivering online sessions (webinars) targeting our

priority clients in our core areas of legal expertise. One aim of the sessions will be to drive access to our advice services for young people needing one-to-one help.

We will also take advice from our Youth Advisory Board about re-focusing our annual Young People's Legal Rights conference as a Know Your Rights event targeting young people and involving young people in design and delivery.

We will continue to update our key Know Your Rights information leaflets and ensure these are made more accessible, and may develop new ones from time to time with the involvement of our volunteers.

## ***9.2 Young People's Legal Rights Conference***

Our annual Young People's Legal Rights Conference brings together lawyers, law students, youth professionals and young people to learn about and discuss matters concerning the law as it affects young people.

In 2020 the event was held online for the first time, with 60 participants convening around the theme of Law in the time of Covid.

In October 2021 we held our 4<sup>th</sup> annual conference, with a theme of 'Discrimination: are young people protected?'

Issues concerning the breadth of the audience for our conference have been raised, including difficulties for some young people in engaging with the level of content.

**Over the period 2021-2024**, we intend to review the audience for our annual Young People's Legal Rights conference and consider improving the participation of young people in the design and delivery of the event. One option would be to re-focus the conference as a Know Your Rights event targeting young people. We will also review the feasibility and pros and cons of delivering the conference in person again. We will seek sponsorship to assist us with the costs of organising the event and the participation of young people.

## ***9.3 Young People's Participation***

Youth Legal has always been passionate about ensuring those in power respect young people's rights, including their right to be heard. We have always listened to young people's views in developing our services and have been keen to extend this principle to the way Youth Legal is run.

In 2021 we took this work to another level in order to give young people a greater say over the decisions the charity makes, and ensure the voices of a wider group of young people drive our priorities and hold us to account for the way we use our resources to meet young people's needs. We appointed two young Trustees to our Management Committee and in July 2021 we established a new Youth Advisory Board comprising nine amazing young people with a passion for young people's rights and a range of relevant lived experiences and expertise.

The Youth Advisory Board's role includes:

- providing advice, insight, ideas and feedback to Youth Legal about what matters to young people;
- helping Youth Legal develop its services to better meet young people's needs and preferences;
- joining with staff and the Board of Trustees to shape and review Youth Legal's strategy;
- acting as ambassadors for Youth Legal, helping to raise awareness of its services and campaigns;
- getting opportunities to speak at local and national events about Youth Legal's work and the importance of young people having fair access to justice;
- undertaking other activities or specific projects that the YAB sees as necessary to improve Youth Legal's services, progress Youth Legal's campaigns or generally further the aims of the charity.

The initial meetings of the Youth Advisory Board have been chaired by our young Trustees and have had a significant influence on this strategy. In addition, two representatives from the Youth Advisory Board and both our young Trustees played active roles on our Strategy Working Group, undertaking work alongside staff and other Trustees to develop this strategy.

**Over the period 2021-2024**, one of our 4 key strategic aims is to ensure young people's voices are central to everything we do, drive service improvement and play an increased influence in Youth Legal's decision-making. We wish to:

- Seek resources to increase our capacity to provide high quality support to the Youth Advisory Board to enable it to play an influential role in the development of our services, strategies, projects and comms.
- Maintain a minimum quota of two young Trustees on the charity's main Board, with links to the Youth Advisory Board.
- Conduct a robust, youth-led needs assessment to inform service developments and ensure our services are meeting emerging needs.
- Review feedback and outcomes monitoring procedures and ensure data on young people's service experiences drive service improvements.
- Re-focus our annual Young People's Legal Rights conference as a Know Your Rights event targeting young people and involving young people in design and delivery.

## **9.4 Policy work**

We seek to change law, policy and practice impacting on young people in the most strategic way.

In the past three years, we have undertaken a joint project with Project 17 to collate detailed information about local authorities' No Recourse to Public Funds practice, support practitioners advocating for destitute clients approaching local authorities for support under s17 Children Act 1989, and assist strategic litigation.

We have also supported a number of policy projects and campaigns led by other organisations, such as Article 39's ['Keep Caring for Children up to 18' campaign](#).

Through the process of developing this plan, we have recognised that we have limited capacity in the staff team to undertake high quality policy work or campaigning. At the same time, there is notable enthusiasm from members of our Youth Advisory Board to get involved

in campaigns, accompanied by interest from youth sector funders in funding youth-led social change – which we have always been committed to in principle. We also believe that, in the current policy climate, strategic litigation and youth-led campaigning may be more effective approaches to achieving the change we seek than staff-led policy work.

**Over the period 2021-2024**, we will seek opportunities to support a shift from staff-led policy work to youth-led campaigning. We will continue to support staff-led policy work and campaigns led by other charities in the sector where this work is closely aligned with our objectives and we have capacity to do so, but we are unlikely to lead such work.

## 10. COMPLIANCE WITH LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Youth Legal complies with all legal requirements, including:

- holding Professional Indemnity Insurance and Employee and Public Liability Insurance
- having robust safeguarding policies and procedures for the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults
- meeting our legal and moral obligations under Data Protection legislation, including GDPR
- complying with guidance from the Charity Commission

Full details are set out in our Office Manual, which is scrutinised regularly as part of audits of our legal service conducted by Lexcel.

**Over the period 2021-2024**, we will ensure we continue to comply with all legal requirements by

- reviewing our policies and procedures regularly;
- updating our safeguarding policy to take account of our wider range of youth participation activities and remote methods of advice delivery;
- maintaining our Lexcel accreditation;
- providing regular training to our Board on their legal responsibilities as Charity Trustees.

## 11. OUR PREMISES

We currently rent offices at Ashburton Youth Centre in Putney under a licence from Regenerate.com.

Before the pandemic, the office met our needs reasonably well, although it is not easily accessible for young people living outside the Putney area. Since March 2020, staff have mainly been working from home and have rarely accessed the office.

**Over the period 2021-2024**, we will review our premises needs in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic and its impact on our ways of working and our clients' access to our services.

## 12. OUR STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERS

We have a number of strong referral partnerships with local frontline organisations which have been critical to clients' continuing access to our services during the pandemic. Notable amongst these partners are: New Horizons Youth Centre, which refers many homelessness-related cases to us; and several organisations working with young migrants and refugees, including CARAS, Refugee Action, Lewisham Refugee & Migrant Network and South London Refugee Association. We also provide 2<sup>nd</sup> tier advice and training to such organisations and tend to deliver our Know Your Rights sessions to young people through them.

We maintain good cross-referral links with other legal advice services, such as Coram Children's Legal Centre and Just for Kids Law, through the 'Housing & Immigration Group' referral network.

Our annual Young People's Legal Rights Conference has proved an effective method of building relationships with a range of youth and legal organisations.

**Over the period 2021-2024, we will:**

- Build on our existing network of referral partnerships with frontline organisations across London, focussing on:
  - Youth homelessness organisations
  - Young migrant organisations
  - Lawyer networks
  - Social services
  - Mental health services (incl. youth advice and counselling services, CAMHS)
  - Youth offending services (incl. probation, youth courts)
  - Schools and FE colleges
  - Youth centres
  - Food banks
  - JobCentre Plus

(Our new casework strategy will help us to focus the development of our referral relationships on organisations which are working with our priority clients and cases.)

- Seek to join further lawyer referral networks, e.g. Community Care Law For Children & Young People.
- Carefully test partnership-working outside London with a youth advice agency.
- Expand the breadth and depth of our partnerships with non-legal youth support organisations to ensure our clients receive help on non-legal issues. Our priority will be to explore ways of improving mental health support for our clients, e.g. through developing a partnership with a youth advice and counselling service.
- Maintain a presence on South West London Law Centres' Advisory Group, which brings us into contact with a range of advice services and other organisations across South London.
- Strengthen our relationship with Just for Kids Law at different organisational levels, clarifying our respective roles, referral relationship, and partnership working on policy & campaigns.
- Make links with emerging legal advice services for young people, e.g. Avocados Advocacy (a service run by care experienced people in Devon for children in care and care leavers) and local Citizens Advice youth projects in East London, to share our expertise and explore referral relationships.
- Invest in building stronger relationships with our funders and potential funders.
- Seek to extend our 2<sup>nd</sup> tier advice role, which would boost awareness of and referrals to Youth Legal from youth organisations.

## 13. PEOPLE, MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

### 13.1 Organisational Chart

#### Board of Trustees

**Chair**  
To Be Recruited

**Treasurer**  
Adeboye Federo

**Director**  
Valerie Clark

**Finance Officer**  
Valerie Clark

**Caseworkers:**  
Valerie Clark  
Community Care Solicitor and Supervisor

Hope Olugbola  
Debt and Money Advice Caseworker

Maureen Vincent  
Community Care/Housing Solicitor

Radhi Shah  
Community Care Solicitor

**Office Manager**  
Renata Wardle

**Support Worker**  
Chloe Levassor

**Retained consultant:**  
James Kenrick (Strategic development)

### 13.2 Management and governance structure

Youth Legal is managed on a day to day basis by the Director. The Director is line-managed by the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees are volunteers who take responsibility for legal governance of the organisation, link us with the community we serve and reflect the diversity within our communities.

The Board of Trustees is legally and financially responsible for Youth Legal and must have between 3 to 15 members sitting on it.

Further details are contained in our Office Manual.

**Over the period 2021-24**, we aim to increase the effectiveness of the charity's decision-making processes, e.g. through reviewing the structure of Board and staff meetings; and finding ways to maintain the joint-working between Trustees, staff and young people that has proved so effective in developing this strategy. We will consider establishing sub-committees to focus on key areas, such as finance and HR. We will maintain a minimum quota of two young Trustees on the charity's main Board, with links to the Youth Advisory Board.

### ***13.3 Developing our people***

During the course of developing this strategy we confirmed that we have an experienced, knowledgeable and happy staff team. However, there are a number of actions we need to take in order to ensure we maintain a workforce with the skills and wellbeing we will need in the future.

**Over the period 2021-24**, we will:

- Maintain our legal expertise in all our current areas of law, with a particular focus on building our specialism and reputation in Community Care & Housing (e.g. through CPD of caseworkers; recruitment; providing 2<sup>nd</sup> tier advice).
- Enhance staff skills and expertise in working with young people (e.g. through training/skills exchange for staff; delivering training for other legal advice organisations).
- Support staff and assess training needs through high quality one to one supervision, annual appraisals and personal training plans.
- Maintain access for staff to mental health counselling (currently provided via London Legal Support Trust).
- Develop a wellbeing strategy.
- Seek digital & comms skills in future staff recruitment.
- Review our procedures for recruiting, inducting and training our Trustees.
- Develop a volunteer, placement & apprenticeship strategy.
- Review staff pay by conducting an informal benchmarking exercise against similar charities.
- Seek to ensure that Youth Legal is a learning organisation, with staff and organisational development at the forefront of all of our activities.

### ***13.4 Diversity & inclusion***

Our focus on young people who face the greatest challenges in securing their rights speaks to our wider commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Last year, 94% of our clients were from racially minoritised communities and many were care leavers, young migrants, or were experiencing long-term health issues or disabilities. Our staff team, Board of Trustees and Youth Advisory Board all reflect this diversity.

**Over the period 2021-24**, we will:

- Review our Equality & Diversity policy.

- Develop an anti-racism policy.
- Seek to ensure that everyone within the organisation has a good awareness of, and commitment to our policies, principles and ways of working.
- Continue to monitor take-up of our services to ensure that they are accessible to all young people and reach those most in need of our help.

## 14. COMMUNICATIONS & BRANDING

Our website was updated in 2019/20 and is generally considered by stakeholders interviewed as part of developing this strategy as adequate for our needs, although it might benefit from some streamlining in some areas. We have recently conducted some work to improve traffic to our website from key sites young people seeking advice might use.

We recognise that our social media output is of variable quality, that we are not always clear who our audience is and that the staff team lacks comms and digital skills. We are grateful to recent advice from our Youth Advisory Board in this area.

We are also aware that our current branding (including our name, strapline and logo) may need updating in light of our future strategic direction.

**Over the period 2021-24, we will:**

- Review our website from the perspective of a young person seeking advice in order to improve the pathways to our services.
- Seek to clarify the purpose of and audience for our social media output and work with the Youth Advisory Board to understand the optimum channels and methods for reaching our target audiences.
- Continue trialling our new email newsletter to communicate developments at Youth Legal to a range of stakeholders.
- Review our branding to ensure it is an appropriate fit to the organisation we have become, our strategy and our ambitions.
- Recruit for digital and comms skills in future staff recruitment.
- Consider the scope to create a volunteer or Kickstarter role focussing on comms.

## 15. FINANCE

### ***15.1 Reserves, budget and financial forecasts***

Our accounts for the financial year 2020/21 show that:

- Our income in 2020/21 was £220,895 (up from £133,951 in 2019/20)
- Our expenditure in 2020/21 was £170,875 (up from £146,653)
- We held unrestricted reserves of £90,572 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, equivalent to c. 5 months' running costs. This represents an increase on the year before, but remains below the target of 6 months' running costs in our reserves policy.

We have a balanced budget for 2021/22, with budgeted income of £229,892.00. Our main sources of income are anticipated to be:

- Grant funding – £150,442
- Legal help and legal aid – £75,750
- Conference and Training income – £2,200
- Donations – £1,500

Our main fixed costs are salaries (accounting for c.73% of budgeted expenditure), and office and premises costs (14%)

Our cash flow forecasts for this year are healthy; we do not anticipate any cash flow problems.

In summary, we are financially stable and sustainable for the current financial year. However, as in previous years, it is impossible to provide much certainty beyond the current year due to the short-term nature of much of our funding.

## **15.2 Financial management**

Our Trustees are responsible for ensuring the financial stability of the Charity, including determining the annual budget and monitoring progress against it. Management accounts are presented to the Trustees every quarter and include an analysis of expenditure against income and budget. Our Treasurer is Adeboye Federo.

Our Finance Officer with day-to-day responsibility for the financial accountability of the Charity is Valerie Clark (Director).

We use *Quickbooks* accounting system for budgeting, bill payment and management reports. Day-to-day bookkeeping is undertaken by our Director and Administrator. Our accounts are prepared by Matt Barnett, a qualified Bookkeeper, and are externally examined by Beverley Campbell, BC Consultancy Services, a member of the Association of Charity Independent Examiners and CIPFA (Affil).

Our Financial Controls Policy contains full details of our financial processes.

**Over the period 2021-24, we will:**

- Review our financial processes.
- Establish a finance sub-committee in order to streamline the role of Trustees in overseeing our finances and increase detailed scrutiny of our finances by Trustees.
- Seek to increase the level of our reserves in line with our reserves policy.

## **16. FUNDRAISING**

### **16.1 Responsibility for fundraising**

The responsibility for maintaining an ongoing and sustainable funding strategy rests with the Board of Trustees, which is advised on strategic issues by the Director.

Fundraising activities, including reporting to funders, are led by the Director, with contributions from other members of staff.

Over the period April 2021 to October 2022, the Board and the Director will be assisted by a Strategic Development Consultant, James Kenrick, thanks to funding from Therium Access.

## 16.2 Current funding

Our two Legal Aid contracts, which are vital to our capacity to undertake specialist casework in housing and community care, have been extended by two years due to the pandemic. We are currently meeting all contract requirements. We are due to have an Annual Review conducted by the Legal Aid Agency before the end of 2021.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic we have been successful in obtaining grant funding from a number of funders to support and ensure continuance of our vital work.

Grants coming to an end include: a 3 year grant from Trust for London for a housing solicitor; and City Bridge funding for our Debt and Money advisor. We will seek continuance or alternative funding for both posts.

### Summary of Youth Legal's secured funding for period Oct 2021 to Sept 2022

	Oct 21	Nov 21	Dec 21	Jan 22	Feb 22	Mar 22	Apr 22	May 22	Jun 22	Jul 22	Aug 22	Sep 22
Legal Aid Agency Contract Comm. Care												
Legal Aid Agency Contract Housing												
Nationwide Homelessness Project												
LLST CoEx												
City Bridge Trust – Debt & Money Advice												
Wandsworth Immigration funding												
Therium - Strategic Development												
Civil Justice Fund Wave 2												
Provident – financial capability												

## 16.3 Fundraising strategy

*Quality and focus of bids* – We recognise that some of our fundraising in the past has lacked focus, leading to a waste of staff time in submitting unsuccessful bids. We will use this strategy to help us focus our fundraising on funders and projects that are closely aligned with

our aims and objectives for the next three years, and will streamline our internal fundraising processes so that we are able to submit better quality bids.

*Input from young people* – We will work closely with our Youth Advisory Board to develop our priorities and ideas for new projects.

*Use of data* - We will invest time early on in the period of this strategy to build our case for investment. We aim to conduct a robust youth-led needs assessment exercise, review our feedback and outcomes forms, and analyse our existing data sources (e.g. AdvicePro) to build up our evidence base.

*Diversification of funding sources* - Youth Legal has developed a good range of funding sources, but remains quite reliant on continued funding flowing from legal aid and from a relatively small number of Trusts and Foundations in the legal advice sector. We will aim to diversify our funding further over the next three years. In particular, we aim to apply for funding from Trusts and Foundations in the youth sector in order to increase our capacity to support young people's engagement (initially in our work and later in youth-led campaigning).

*Sustainability and core costs* – Our lack of capacity to undertake some of our core functions (e.g. finance, fundraising, comms, admin.) is a result of the short-term, restricted nature of much funding available to us. We will seek opportunities to bring in core and unrestricted funding wherever possible, and to build our unrestricted reserves to the level agreed in our reserves policy. We are committed to ensuring that we accurately cost our projects to include core costs by adopting a full cost recovery approach.

## **16.4 Fundraising priorities**

We have set the following fundraising priorities for the period 2021-24:

### **High priority:**

- Core costs – ideally long-term, unrestricted funds
- Maintain/develop casework capacity in Community Care and Housing
- Undertake a robust needs assessment exercise
- Create a new youth support/advocacy worker role to provide holistic support on non-legal issues and support YAB

### **Medium priority:**

- Maintain/develop casework capacity in Money/debt, Welfare Benefits and Immigration
- Develop quality and quantity of our Know Your Rights work
- Strategic litigation funding
- Develop our 2<sup>nd</sup> tier advice role supporting youth professionals
- Sponsorship for Conference

### **Lower priority/longer-term:**

- Fill gaps in areas of law/casework in response to evidence of unmet need
- Support youth-led campaigning
- Volunteer support
- Create Comms capacity in paid staff team
- Extend strategic development capacity
- Holistic support to clients, incl. counselling

## 17. RISK MANAGEMENT

The Trustees regularly assess the major risks to which we are exposed, in particular those related to the operations and finances of the Charity. Where appropriate, systems or procedures have been established to mitigate the risks the charity faces.

In addition, in accordance with Lexcel requirements, our Risk Manager (Valerie Clark) manages our regulatory risks, such as compliance with the Solicitors' Regulation Authority Code of Conduct; the Financial Conduct Authority Consumer Credit Source Book; and OISC accreditation requirements. Each July an annual review is conducted of all risk assessment data generated within Youth Legal relating to the operation of our legal practice.

Current risks identified for the period of this strategy include:

- The potential for a sudden loss of a major funder or contract
- Loss of key staff and/or failure to recruit
- Loss of relevance in a post-pandemic digital landscape of legal provision
- Staff wellbeing
- Cyber crime
- Expanding too quickly without a period of consolidation

**Over the period 2021-24, we will:**

- Review the format of our risk register and our process for the Board of Trustees to review risks.
- Bring an updated risk register to the Board of Trustees every quarter highlighting key risks, mitigations put in place and changes in risk levels.

## 18. REVIEWING THIS PLAN

This strategy provides a clear direction of travel for Youth Legal over the next three years until September 2024. However, as the plan has been developed at a time of extreme uncertainty, amidst a pandemic, we recognise that a good deal of flexibility will be required and the plan will be kept under regular review.

For each year of the strategy, we will develop a detailed workplan with agreed milestones and leads for each of our objectives. The development and management of the plan will be led by Youth Legal's Director.

The staff team will hold quarterly planning meetings at which we will review our progress against the detailed workplan for that year.

The staff team will prepare a report every 6 months summarising progress and highlighting any areas of concern. These reports will be provided to the Strategy Working Group and the full Board of Trustees.

Every 6 months, our Strategy Working Group will meet to review our progress against the plan. The Strategy Working Group will report its findings and recommendations to the full Board of Trustees every 6 months.

The full Board of Trustees will consider the report from staff and the findings of the Strategy Working Group every 6 months and shall approve a new annual workplan every 12 months.

## **19. CONTACT DETAILS**

For enquiries relating to this plan, please contact:

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