

Annual Review

Legal Action Group | December 2020



Welcome to Legal Action Group's second Annual Review



Dr Laura Janes (chair)

LAG not only survived 2020, a challenge in itself, but thrived. The year began with LAG's first ever art show – Henny Beaumont's original artwork from the Judge Brenda children's book – which opened at the Supreme Court in February 2020 with over a hundred guests. Little did we know then that this event was to be the last of our in-person get-togethers for the rest of the year.

As ever, our small and incredibly dedicated staff team quickly adapted to working from home and with the support of our community of authors and friends maintained our programme of books, articles and events. Several books had fantastic online launches which enabled many more friends and colleagues to participate. *Legal Action* published a series of important articles on the legal and practical challenges our readers faced as a result of COVID. LAG also developed its online offer in the course of the year to support people working from home.

We also produced two lockdown-specific publications – our first book of poetry showcasing the hidden talents of the LAG community to lift the spirits of our readers,

and essays from the pandemic, which provides an important and powerful contemporaneous record of how the pandemic has affected clients, lawyers and the law itself.

LAG was lucky to have the unswerving commitment and expertise of the indefatigable Carol Storer, who kindly remained on as interim director to steer the organisation through the pandemic and supported the recruitment of a new

chief executive. The Board was delighted to appoint Sue James, long-time friend and author for LAG, who takes up her post in March 2021.

As chair, I would like to say a special thanks to the staff at LAG, my colleagues on the Board and our many friends, authors and contributors who have shown just how incredible, versatile and steadfast the LAG family is even in the face of adversity. ■



Carol Storer OBE
(interim director)

My two years at LAG have been so different. In the first year, we put a lot of resource into holding our own face-to-face events and selling our books and *Legal Action* at other organisations' conferences. We planned to replicate that in 2020 when along came the pandemic. We moved out of the office and all worked from home.

Our face-to-face training and events moved online. Delegate numbers increased and it was a pleasure to welcome so many people from outside London and the south east – a factor we will consider carefully when in-person

events are once again permitted. As working from home settled down, emails increased about how to access digital versions of LAG books and *Legal Action*. Instead of passing round a book in the office, organisations needed to know how teams could access the online versions. From articles being made available for free to innovative book deals with practices and universities, LAG staff all responded magnificently to such a challenging environment.

On the policy front, I co-chaired the Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable, with Sir Robin Knowles. It has been an important channel for communicating what people were doing in lockdown and supporting innovative ideas. Working for LAG enabled me to continue chairing The Law Society Access to Justice Committee and that has been a very useful relationship to enable input into policy initiatives.

I am taking a few months off to spend time with family members, both old and new. It has been an absolute privilege to work with LAG colleagues, the Board, representative bodies and all the authors and trainers. It is an enormous pleasure to hand over to Sue James. ■

Update from our publishing director, Esther Pilger



Esther Pilger (publishing director)

2020 was an extraordinary, busy and challenging year but often difficult times force us to make changes, innovate and draw into focus the things that are important.

The year started normally enough with the publication of *Legal Aid Handbook 2020/21* and *Gypsy and Traveller Law*. When the world started to change in March, we were very clear on our role. LAG needed to provide professionals working in the social justice community with the tools to support their clients, and to assist organisations adapt to remote working. We kept lawyers up to date with the fast-moving changes to the law and made this content freely and widely available to non-subscribers as well as subscribers, and worked hard to set people up with online access to *Legal Action*.

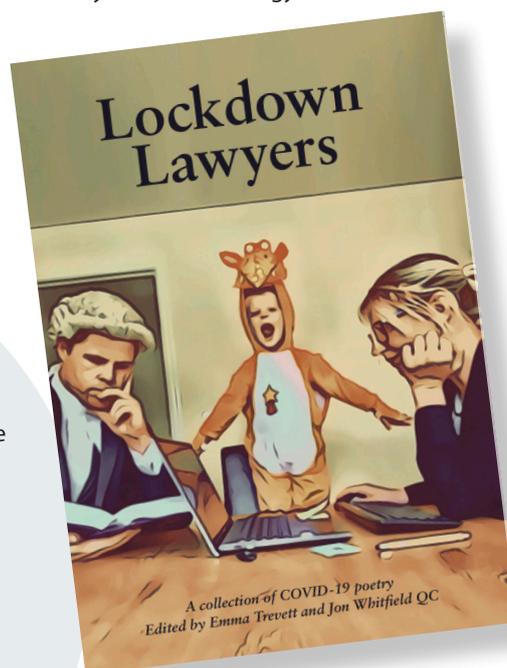
We provided free electronic resources to a huge network of organisations finding themselves at home with their all-important LAG books trapped in inaccessible offices. Our eBook sales

went through the roof and we quickly developed multi-user licences to make it affordable for organisations to provide the resources to large teams.

It is likely that in the annual review of 2021 we will not be talking just about books and the magazine. More and more, we are dealing with organisations asking for a list of 'resources' that are a mixture of books, the magazine and law reports – some in print and some in electronic form. LAG is relishing the challenge to meet the rapidly changing needs of the legal aid sector.

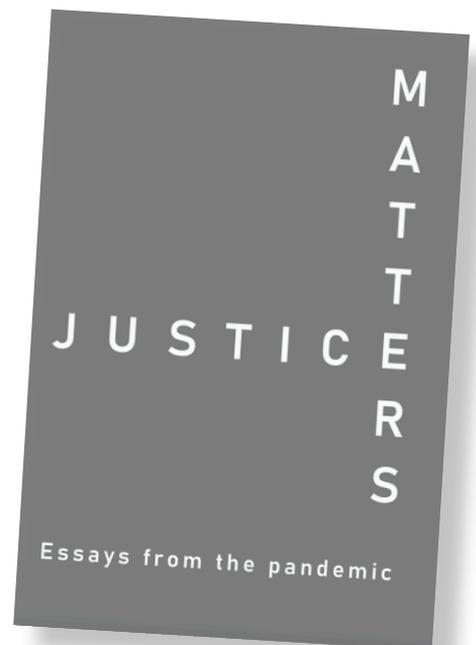
We published eight books in 2020, which did not seem possible when we left the office in March. For some, the pandemic ripped their livelihoods away. For most LAG authors, their working lives were busier than ever protecting their vulnerable clients while juggling the demands of home, and this did not leave much time for writing. Besides, the law was moving at such a pace with temporary measures, it was not the time to publish a book that would be out of date before it was released.

A chance email from Emma Trevett and Jon Whitfield QC brought us *Lockdown Lawyers* – an anthology



of poems from legal aid lawyers reflecting on their experiences. Some were moving, some were challenging and some were funny. Together, they will always serve as a reminder and a record of this time. All proceeds from the book were donated to the Law Centres Network.

A spring conversation with Spike Mullings and Sue James saw the creation of *Justice Matters* with the wonderful team at Justice Alliance. Our hope to create a volume of reflections on the pandemic, and a call for change, ended up being so much more and led to



two wonderful events with dramatised readings and a front-page splash in the *Guardian* thanks to the inclusion of an essay by our friend Lady Hale! *Justice Matters* will continue to be a volume of great importance for some time to come.

It was a natural progression from there to publish Professor Luke Clements' *Clustered injustice and the level green*, which should be required reading for all who work with disadvantaged people. Clements challenges us to consider that not only does the law not solve a lot of

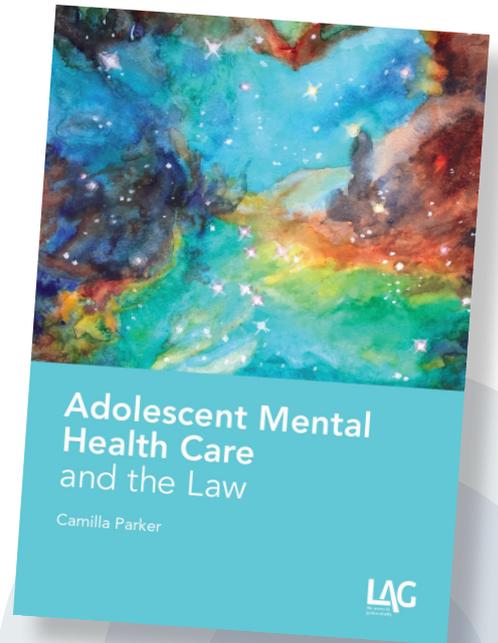
the problems in society, it may contribute to them. A review of the book said:

“It is very much to LAG’s credit that they should be publishing this book, which serves as so important a reminder that legal action (two of the three words within the publisher’s very title) is not, and should not just be, limited to taking action within the law as it stands, but also taking action about the law.”

Many thanks are due to one of our patrons and authors, Ed Cape, for the latest edition of *Defending Suspects at Police Stations* with Sandra Paul and Matthew Hardcastle, which to many in criminal law is simply referred to as the Bible. As senior criminal lawyer Robin Murray of Tuckers says: ‘No self-respecting defence lawyer who attends police stations can possibly be without this book.’

Thanks are also due to Andrew Arden QC and Andrew Dymond for *Manual of Housing Law*; to the team of authors who wrote *Disabled Children*; and to Camilla Parker for our new book, *Adolescent Mental Health Care and the Law*. This is a fantastic addition to the LAG list on a complex area of law. We are delighted that the book has been adopted by the Mental Health Tribunal judges and the Mental Health Review Tribunal legal members in Wales.

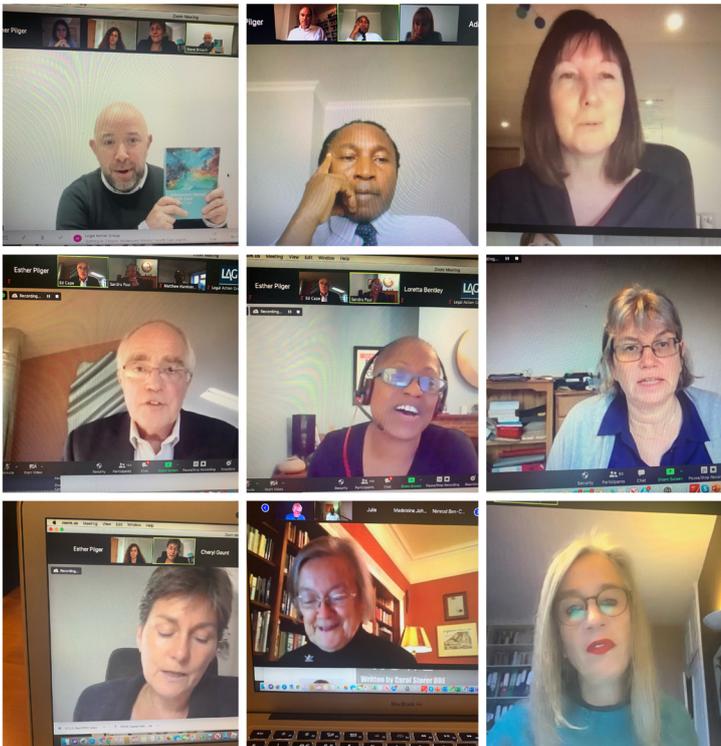
As well as the success, we had great sadness in 2020 in losing Stephen Knafler QC, who was not only a remarkable lawyer but a great friend of LAG and author of a number of our books. Stephen was the founding editor of the *Community Care Law Reports* and was the general editor from 1997–2020. We were pleased to welcome Stephen Cragg QC to take over as general editor – he has also been involved in the law reports since they began. We invited Shu Shin Luh of Doughty Street Chambers to join the team and are delighted she accepted. ■



LAG would not exist but for a huge network of brilliant authors who give up their time to work with us.

We are grateful to all of you.

Training and Events



Anyone who was involved in putting on events in 2020 will know how sharp the learning curve was. We put on our first Zoom training course in September and it is fair to say the stress levels were high! It was a huge success and since then over 1,000 people have attended LAG training, seminars and launches in 2020.

Talking about the upside to 2020 is difficult, but to welcome so many new people from outside of London to our events, and to be able to offer pricing that makes the training even more accessible, has been a real bonus.

We were also challenged to think about new ways to launch products and now have seminars linked to books and the magazine that provide a way to meet the authors, ask those burning questions and provide another way for practitioners to complete their continuing competence requirements.

Our trainers have been phenomenal in how they have adapted to the new way of presenting courses. They have been incredibly supportive and open to new ideas. We are very grateful to Jo Walters, who came on board to help us run our courses. She has brought professionalism and technical skill to the role. 2021 will bring fresh challenges as we consider how we can take the best of online training and run hybrid courses where we meet face to face. ■

We also have lots of new ideas we will be sharing with you soon!

Legal Action magazine

Reporting on a pandemic



Louise Heath (editor)



Marc Bloomfield (deputy editor)

who carried on writing while chaos descended on the courts and their working and home lives. We were thrilled to welcome Dave Cowan to the *Legal Action* author family in May, with his first 'Owner-occupiers: review', having taken over the annual round-up from Derek McConnell. In October, Victoria Speed at the Employment Legal Advice Network started a new twice-yearly column updating readers on

Despite the massive upheavals of 2020, which hit the *Legal Action* team like everyone else, with homeschooling and homeworking added to the usual challenges of getting a magazine to press, we are really proud that every issue was delivered without delay and packed full of essential content for our readers, from Grenfell to Black Lives Matter to, of course, all the fallout from COVID-19 and its impact on civil liberties, housing, employment, disabled people, education and much more.

In lockdown one, realising that our readers would likely not be able to access office copies of the magazine, we made sure full PDFs of each issue were added to the website and available to subscribers. We also made all COVID-related content freely available online. We listened to our readers and decided to make the PDF upload permanent – all back issues of *Legal Action* from the last 20 years are now available to subscribers in the archive area of the website. We have continued to pursue our 'digital first' strategy, putting articles online as soon as they are edited, with full links to relevant policy documents and case transcripts.

As always, we are completely dependent on and extremely grateful for the contributions of our amazing authors,

ELAN's work on employment rights.

We also said goodbye to some very longstanding authors. Karen Ashton wrote her last 'Community care: update' in September 2020 after 15 years; a new team from Rook Irwin Sweeney and 39 Essex Chambers will take up the reins this year, with existing co-author Shu Shin Luh. Heather Williams QC, who has also written for the magazine for many years, penned her last 'Police misconduct: update' in November 2020 (her co-authors, Stephen Cragg QC and Tony Murphy, will continue the series) and Jed Pennington stepped down from the 'Immigration detention: update' series after seven years. The magazine team and LAG send them all enormous thanks for their commitment to *Legal Action* over such a long time.

Heloise Gillingham joined the *Legal Action* team in 2020 to steer its marketing and customer relations. She has done some brilliant work with firms and chambers to find out how we can offer the magazine in the most accessible, user-friendly way. We have improved our communications with subscribers via a regular email to update on the latest magazine content.

Thank you to our readers for sticking with us through a tumultuous year and here's to a much better 2021 for everyone. ■



2020 Finance Report

	2020 £ not yet audited	2019 £ audited	2018 £ audited
Total Income	540,023	619,669	606,863
Total Expenditure	500,549	564,000	633,488
Net Movement	69,474	55,669	(26,625)
B/F Balance	75,889	20,220	46,845
C/F Balance	115,363	75,889	20,220
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Restricted Funds	32,012	15,399	40,254
Unrestricted Funds	83,354	60,490	(20,034)



LAG Thank yous

the access to justice charity

Thank you to LAG's Board for their input and support over this difficult year. LAG chair Dr Laura Janes, vice-chair Russell Conway, treasurer Oliver Rivers along with academic Sonia Kalsi, barrister Angela Patrick, solicitor Heather Thomas and consumer champion Julian Allen make up an extremely talented and conscientious Board.

All LAG staff moved swiftly to remote working and displayed great fortitude throughout 2020. As can be seen in this review, there have been many challenges including homeworking, homeschooling, a massive increase in enquiries, constantly thinking about what our readers needed, being innovative but always professional. The LAG staff team have met all of these challenges.

Thank you to all the organisations that have helped us with our events including Herbert Smith Freehills, UCL, 39 Essex Chambers, Doughty Street Chambers, Garden Court Chambers, Garden Court North, Matrix Chambers, Hogan Lovells and Freshfields.

All speakers at our conferences donate their time for free. We thank them for their support, and thank our trainers and authors for the high-quality work they continue to produce.

We moved out of the National Pro Bono Centre and want to thank all the charities with which we shared an office for all their support while we worked together. We may well end up sharing space with them in future.

We thank our grant funders The Legal Education Foundation, Therium Access and Trust for London (through the London Funders scheme). Trust for London dealt with an emergency grant to LAG to help us with our move to remote working. Therium Access funding supports *Housing Possession Duty Desk – a practical guide* and The Legal Education Foundation continues to support our sustained growth and our digital offering. ■



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