

## About Support Through Court

Founded in 2001 by the late Diana Copisarow, Mark Sheldon (former President of the Law Society) and Michael Naish (former Director of the Witness Service), Support Through Court is the only organisation exclusively dedicated to increasing access to justice for those without legal representation in the civil or family courts. Today we are an award-winning organisation with over 880 volunteers operating 21 services across England and Wales (20 face-to-face in court services as well as a National Helpline).

## Transforming lives cost-effectively



As a lean organisation with just 36 full-time employees, our service is delivered by a team of trained volunteers who change the fortunes of ordinary people as they, for example, battle to avoid eviction, make an emergency injunction to protect their children, move away from an abusive relationship or fight economic disadvantage.

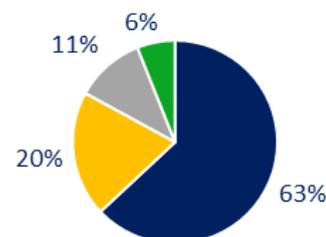
They provide practical and emotional support before, during and after civil and family litigation, often during times of extreme stress and crisis, to ensure clients are valued, respected and better able to achieve justice. They provide wide-ranging and often critical support e.g. legal information, explaining what would happen in court, helping people to fill out complicated legal forms, supporting them as they plan what they would like to say to the judge as well as signposting to external agencies. Their support not only makes a person's experience much less stressful but can also have a direct impact on the outcome of their case and in consequence on the rest of their lives. Feedback in 2019/20 shows that 100% of our clients are satisfied with our work with 98% feeling that our support enabled them to get a fairer hearing in court.

## We lead the way in increasing access to justice

We are enormously proud that since our formation, Support Through Court has been leading the way in increasing access to justice. Last year we supported people on 78,506 occasions in cases such as:

- Domestic abuse, parental responsibility, contact orders and emergency injunctions
- Eviction and housing matters
- Welfare benefits challenges and debt/money claims

Over half of our help last year (63%) involved supporting people in family matters. A further 20% of cases involved financial matters and 11% concerned housing issues. Therefore 94% of our work potentially has life-changing consequences on our clients and without the right support can place people at risk of abuse, debt or even homelessness.



■ Family ■ Money ■ Housing ■ Other

Low overheads	Value for money	Quality provision	Big impact
<b>£0</b>	<b>£1.6m</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>78,000+</b>
Free accommodation from the 20 courts we operate from	In-kind contribution from our 881 volunteers	Our support enabled our clients to get a fairer hearing in court	Leading the way in increasing access to justice

## Jusice on lockdown?

Today, more than ever before, people accessing justice face a multitude of barriers and disadvantage. Increased inequality, closure of advice centres, higher court fees and sweeping cuts to legal aid have all eroded the public’s access to justice. In a world where nearly 70% of people have no knowledge of basic legal processes (Public Legal Education Network) and laws imposing duties and conferring rights are increasing in quantity and complexity, the need to support the vulnerable is greater than ever.

Those hit hardest by these changes are those on living on the margins of society. Litigants are now representing themselves in life altering cases in distressing circumstances and often against professional representation. Their troubles are often compounded by additional disadvantages such as unemployment, mental or physical disability and language barriers.

Perhaps the most critical changes to the legal system arose from the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) in April 2013, a law which Lord Bach described as “verging on the unconstitutional” challenging clause 40 of Magna Carta which reads, "to no one will we sell, to no one will we refuse or delay, right or justice." Now areas of the law most associated with disadvantage (education, employment, debt, housing, immigration and welfare benefits), including private law children and family cases, have been taken out of scope for legal aid resulting in an 82% reduction in people accessing legal aid (House of Commons Library). Without the economic means to access a lawyer, more and more people are being forced into a situation whereby, if they wish to pursue justice, they must do so alone navigating an unfamiliar legal system and a courtroom which is "elaborate, ritualised and - in many respects – archaic” (Structured Mayhem, 2015).

## The unprecedented demand for our work

Since the implementation of LASPO in 2013 demand for our service continues to rise. The below table illustrates the growing number of people we have supported in over the past 6 years since the enactment of LASPO and the subsequent 82% reduction in people accessing legal aid.

Outcomes	2012/13*	2019/20	% increase
No. of client contacts	9,217	78,506	752%
Number of volunteers	200	881	340%
No. of services	7	21	200%
Overall income	£230,758	£1,791,153	676%

\*prior to the implementation of LASPO 2013

“If you ask for help in a Support Through Court office, you will not see any indication of luxury or waste – just a table, a chair and a few PCs – because their most important asset is the human being sitting next to you.”

**The Rt Hon the Lord Judge**

## Supporting the marginalised and disadvantaged

Many of our clients face additional disadvantages making it even harder for them to engage with the court system and access justice. Below the 2019/20 sociodemographic data of our beneficiaries:

Health	Language	Employment	Ethnicity	Age
<b>37%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>28%</b>
Had a serious health issue or disability	Did not have English as a first language	Not in any form of employment	From ethnic minority backgrounds	Were over the age of 50

## An award-winning quality service

Not only are we a cost-effective solution, we are also a high-quality and award-winning service.

Satisfaction rate	Increased confidence levels	Better prepared for court case	Fairer hearing in court	Award-winning Best Legal Volunteers 2020
100%	99%	99%	98%	

**Jazmin is a survivor of domestic abuse** and is typical of the type of case that Support Through Court help with daily. Her ex-partner had made a Child Arrangements Order application after Jazmin escaped the relationship. Jazmin arrived at Support Through Court having been referred to us by Court Ushers. She had become very distressed when she saw her abusive ex-partner in a waiting area: she had a panic attack and was taken to a side room by the ushers.

Angela, a Support Through Court volunteer, came to her and calmed her down. It was now early afternoon and it transpired Jazmin was so anxious that she hadn't eaten all day. Angela got her a drink and something to eat - a practical gesture that can make a huge difference in how someone can physically manage the stress of court. Angela explained what the court can do to help Jazmin participate in the court proceedings and helped her to ask for a separate waiting room and screens (to keep her separate from the other party) in court. Angela stayed with her before and during the hearing and made sure that she understood what was happening in the hearing and what the court was asking her to do.

Jazmin was terrified when she walked into the court building but with Support Through Court's help, she was able to manage her fear and take part fully in the proceedings. Before Jazmin left, the volunteer explained what support was available to her through local domestic abuse agencies and she was given the telephone numbers that she needed to contact them.

## Overcoming the Covid-19 disruption

Though we are unable to currently provide face-to-face support during the lockdown, we recognise that many courts are still functioning with focus on priority cases. To ensure we are still there for people who need us, our volunteers are now supporting clients virtually via email and in online court hearings via video/telephone conferencing. We have also made our support available remotely through our recently launched (March 2020) national telephone helpline service. Our helpline is now proving to be a vital support mechanism, currently taking over 1,000 calls per month. We are also seeing a dramatic rise in people requesting support for family/domestic abuse cases in line with findings from Refuge who reported a 25% and 150% increase in calls and web traffic, respectively. Our support has now become a matter of life and death as victims such as women and children are forced to isolate with abusers.



## Reopening our doors and our financial health

We envisage opening our services in September 2020 once the lockdown measures are loosened and we have appropriate safeguarding in place. As an unfashionable charity, which does not receive widespread support, we have done tremendously to achieve annual income growth over the years. However, in the backdrop of an unprecedented public health emergency, our fundraising efforts remain uncertain and 2020/21 could prove decisive. Our reserves as of June are likely to be 4 months and cashflow in these uncertain times remains a pressing issue. As the only organisation dedicated to supporting people in court, we need to maintain our services – we have never needed your support more than we need it now.

## Changing fortunes for less than £35 per client

In the 20/21 financial year, despite the disruption to our service, with your support we will:

- Provide approximately 50,000 sessions of support, equating to less than £35 per client
- Regroup and deal with the inevitable backlog of cases
- Reshape our service delivery to ensure social distancing and safeguarding

2020-21 Expenditure Budget		
Expenditure	Amount	Description
Salary & Staff Costs	£1,251,962	Salary costs + staff training/travel costs
Marketing /Fundraising	£28,250	Producing flyers and posters and event promotion
Governance	£13,000	Insurance & audit fees
Volunteer Expenses	£58,710	Travel & subsistence (£9 per day)
Office Costs	£28,465	Stationery and printing etc.
IT Costs	£58,190	Staff, software and equipment
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,438,377</b>	

## We can't do this without you

Every year thousands of people across the country find themselves facing the battle of a lifetime in court, alone and without help. Be it a parent fighting for custody for their children or a vulnerable woman forced to isolate with her physically abusive husband. Their long road to justice will inevitably start with a phone call to Support Through Court. We need your help to make sure we are there for them.

As courts re-open, help us be there for people like Jazmin. To re-open in a safe, sustainable way, we need your help. We are extremely grateful for all donations, but if you are able:

**£500** will pay for new computers to work with clients

**£250** can train and support volunteers in the new ways of working

**£100** can install screens to protect volunteers and clients

**£35** could help buy hand sanitizer and gloves to help people safely

To make a donation please click [here](#).

or send a cheque payable to: Support Through Court and posted to: Friends, Support Through Court, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, WC2A 2LL.