



Suffolk
Law
Centre

Impact Report

2023-24

Providing access to specialist legal help for the community.

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Our Staff in 2023-24

- **Alex Varadeu** – Legal Triage Officer
- **Audrey Ludwig** – Director of Legal Services
- **Carol Ward** – Family Solicitor
- **Colby Salam** – Family Paralegal
- **James Hanlon** – Housing Supervisor (to December 2023)
- **Julie Baker** – Discrimination Caseworker (Actions Against Public Bodies)
- **Kisha Duhaney** – Admin and Billing Assistant
- **Karis Le Winton** – Trainee Solicitor: Justice First Fellow (to December 2023)
- **Kerry Bland** – Housing Supervisor (Locum)
- **Lucy Davies** – Housing Supervisor (to November 2023)/Housing Court Duty Advisor
- **Louise Lockwood** – Finance Manager (to August 2023)
- **Paula Beaton** – Admin Assistant (Triage)
- **Richard Hinton** – Discrimination Supervisor
- **Sayed Muslimyan** – Office Manager
- **Sharon O'Donnell** – Family Caseworker
- **Sophie Steward** – Practice Manager
- **Stephanie Longmore** – Reception/Triage Officer (to October 2023)
- **Sue Wardell** – Operations and Development Manager

Welcome from our Director

2023-24 was a very challenging year and everyone at Suffolk Law Centre (SLC) rose to it magnificently.

Our core casework services: **Housing, Family, Discrimination** continued to provide specialist legal advice for people unable to afford or access private solicitors. The impact of preventing eviction, enforcing the duty to do disability related reasonable adjustments or ensuring parents have contact with their children is vital, not just for the individuals involved, but for whole families and communities.



As the country's economy worsened, many clients came to us with their legal problems having escalated, compounded by the cost of living, and thereby often more complex to resolve. Further, reduced mental health and social care services has had a negative impact on peoples' wellbeing, meaning many are in crisis by the time they get in contact with us.

Our **Legal Triage** service has been there to help people unpick their legal problems and offer a wrap-around service to support them through the process and find lasting solutions.

Our pro bono **Legal Advice Clinics**, so wonderfully supported by volunteer legal professionals from local, regional and national law firms, have meant that people needing some free initial advice to explain their legal problem can get the clarity they need to take the next steps.

There were major governance changes for SLC this year. We had almost a whole new Board start on 1 April 2023. They have proved to be enthusiastic, thoughtful and perceptive. Our deepest gratitude to our former Trustees, shared with Ipswich and Suffolk Council for Racial Equality (ISCRE), our founding charity, for their generous support in getting us to this point.

We also finalised SLC contracts for those residual staff members seconded from ISCRE. We renegotiated a service legal agreement on shared backroom services and staff, helping us both to reduce cost and focus funding on providing services. This is important as we have experienced huge increases in core costs, especially energy costs which doubled in 2023-24.

Funding was ending or had ended for several core projects. Intensive focus on grant applications led to good news towards the end of 2023 as we secured multi-year funding, including from the Legal Education Foundation and Access To Justice Foundation's ILTA grant programme, supported by the National Lottery. Whilst we face further funding challenges in 2024-25, this gave us a firmer base to work from.

We had some staffing challenges, most notably with our Housing service, but we are very grateful to Housing Solicitor, Kerry Bland for her continued support, and to Lucy Davies, for her excellent cover of the Housing team and for maintaining our HLPAS Duty service at Bury St. Edmunds Court.

We lost our finance staff and needed to upgrade our systems and processes. We have successfully outsourced our bookkeeping to accountants Lovewell Blake who have done an excellent job.

For part of the year, we had no properly staffed reception due to staff ill-health and then resignation. We successfully recruited our new Administrative Assistant, Paula Beaton in February 2024, and she has done a great job at getting us back on our feet.

Lastly, a huge thank you to **Suffolk and North Essex Law Society** for their ongoing support, including our most successful fundraising Legal Walk event ever in July 2023, and a great **National Pro Bono Week** event in November 2023.

Audrey Ludwig

Director of Legal Services

SLC 2023-24 In Numbers -

795
Clients

£350,000
value of Legal Advice
services provided for free

Over 60
Staff and Volunteers
across our services

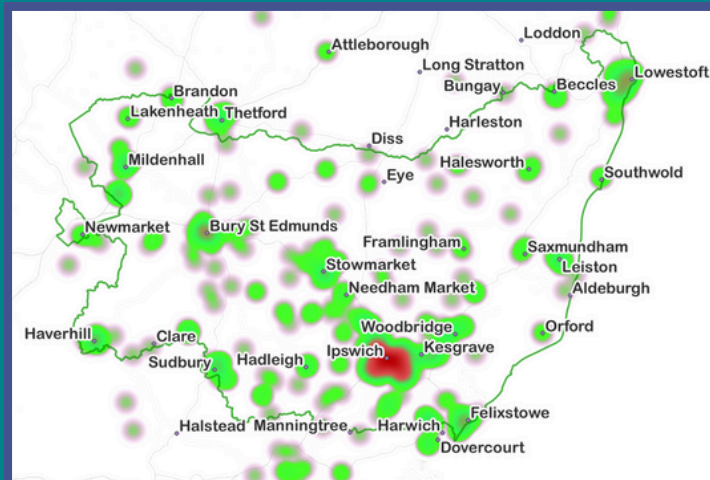
Clients by Local Authority area

The top 5 local authority areas where our clients lived -

Local Authority	2022-23	2023-24	% Change
Ipswich	258	248	-3.95%
East Suffolk	157	141	-10.74%
West Suffolk	92	84	-9.09%
Mid Suffolk	44	67	+41.44%
Babergh	46	63	+31.19%

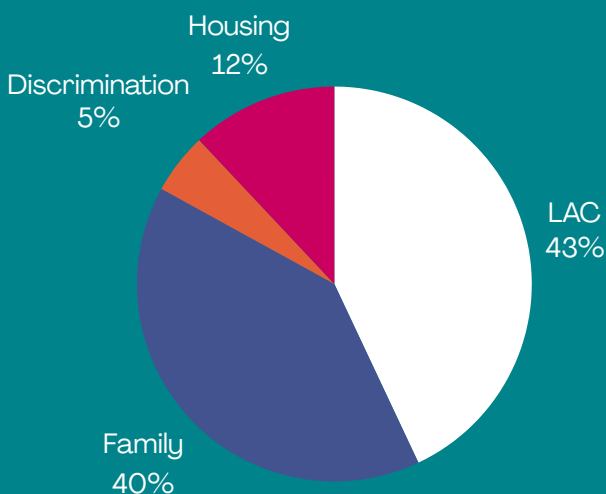
Client Location Heatmap

We help people across the entirety Suffolk and East Anglia.



In 2023-24, we were keen to extend our reach across Suffolk. This is reflected in the increase in clients from Babergh and Mid-Suffolk.

Clients by Service



Client Demographics



22%

of our clients identified as disabled or long-term sick in 2023-24



78%

of our clients are not in full-time work or education



40%

of our clients are aged between 35-49 years old



66%

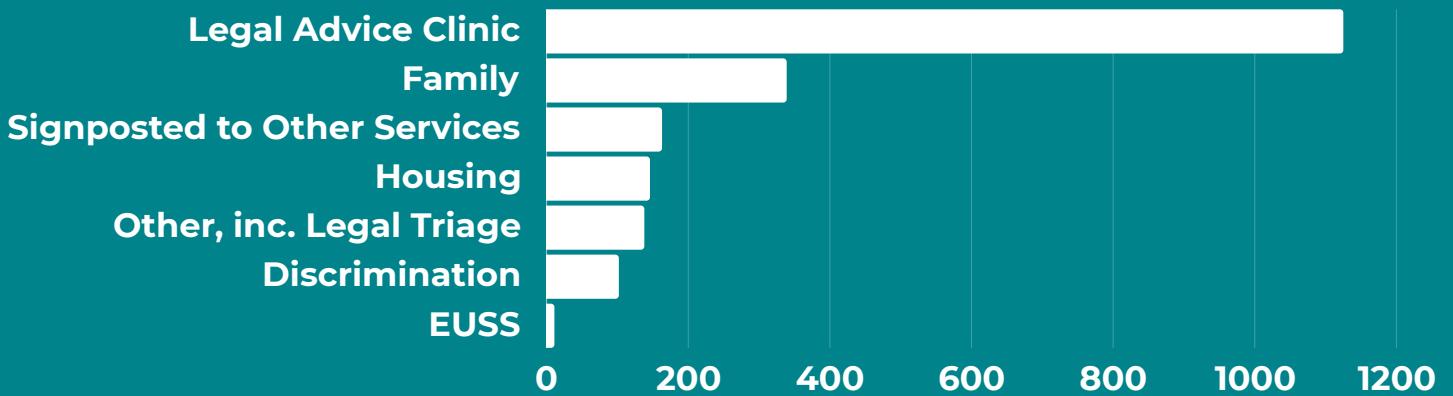
of our clients are female



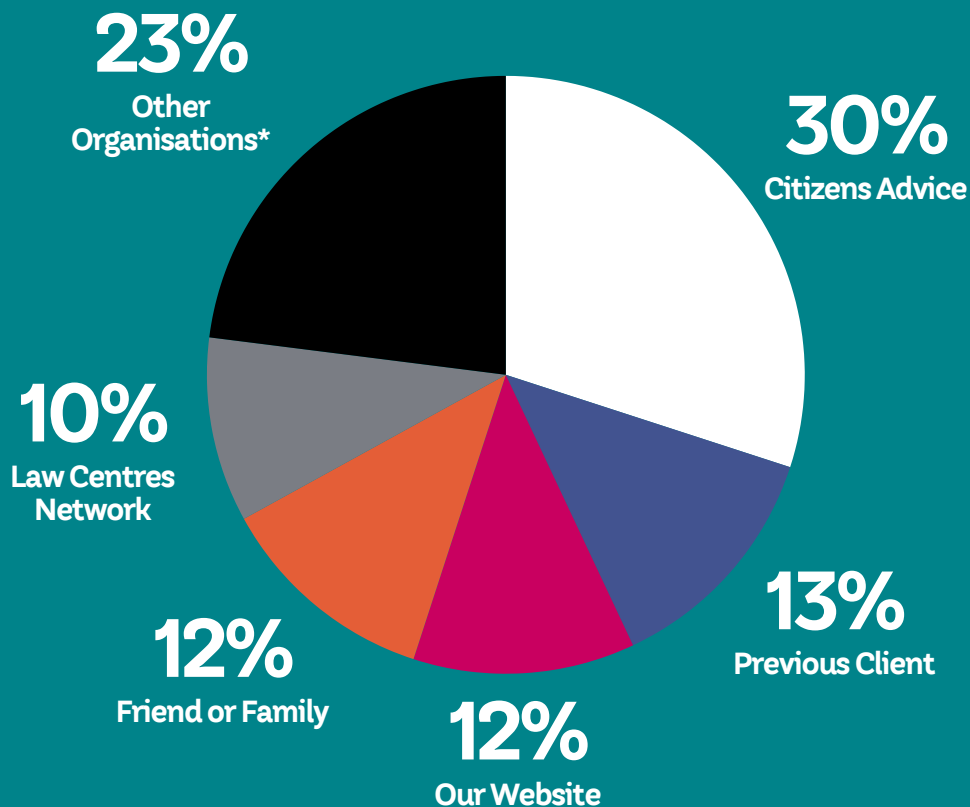
SLC 2023-24 In Numbers -

Enquiries

Our reception and triage team received 1664 initial enquiries in 2023-24. The graph below shows how these enquiries were triaged: either to one of our casework teams or signposted to another source of help.



People told us they heard about Suffolk Law Centre from:



*over 20 different organisations.

Discrimination

Our **Discrimination Team** provides free legal advice and assistance to people experiencing unlawful discrimination. We hold a Discrimination Legal Aid contract, which means we can also offer legal representation to those clients who are eligible for assistance under this funding.

Our Discrimination team has been supported by grant funding to start 2 new projects this year:

Suffolk Access to Justice (SAJ) project funded by the **Bell Foundation**, is a partnership with ISCRE to engage minoritised communities, particularly Roma and other new EU communities in Suffolk to identify their legal advice needs and increase their access to legal advice.

HUB Project funded by **Baring Foundation** and **Law Centres Network** to support Neuro-Divergent Young People to **JOIN, STAY** and **FLOURISH** in the workplace.

Disability



60%

of our discrimination clients identify as disabled or long-term sick

“ I just wanted to thank you for all the advice and help that you have given me with my case. I am so pleased that this matter has now been resolved with a positive outcome for myself. I really couldn't have done it without your help and guidance.

- **Discrimination Client** ”

Case Study

Issue: Our client received an autism diagnosis while in the training period of their apprenticeship. They were uncertain how to approach their employer and anxious about losing their job.

What We Did: We supported the client to identify and request reasonable adjustments, and ensure that the employer implemented adjustments and changed working practices. The client was also referred to a partner support organisation to provide them with additional help.

Outcome: Client kept their job and received the support they need in work. They now have the knowledge they need to request adjustments in the future.



Julie Baker
Discrimination
Caseworker

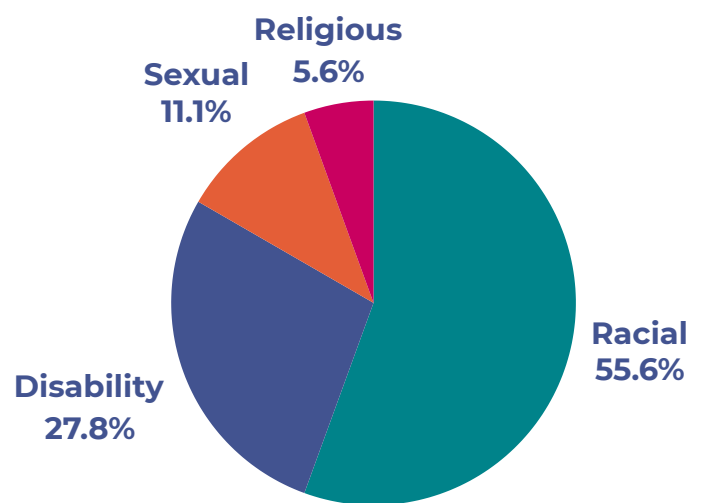
Julie supports clients in taking actions against public authorities, and making formal complaints to the relevant Police Professional Standards Department. When these complaints have not been investigated adequately or proportionally, they are reviewed by the **Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)**.

15 clients

in the 2023-24
reporting year

12 were supported to IOPC review, and 7 had their complaint upheld by the IOPC.

Percentage Breakdown of Discrimination Complaints by Type



Case Study

The problem: Client with Autism had been experiencing horrendous ASB for many years, causing them significant distress. Their complaints to the police, housing provider and county council were not acted upon. The client was forced to move house.

What we did: SLC supported the client to proceed with complaints against police, housing provider and county council on the basis of disability discrimination. Across all 3 of these bodies, the complaints were upheld by the relevant independent regulators.

The impact: The client received apologies from all 3 bodies. Both the housing provider and the council were required to offer financial recompense to our client in recognition of the injustice caused by their failure to adhere to their policies. Further, as a result of our interventions, all 3 bodies undertook training for staff and review of procedures in respect to supporting people with disabilities and duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Family Law

About our Family Law Services

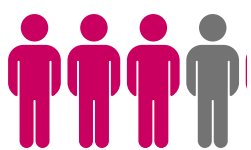
We offer FREE advice and casework support across a range of family legal issues relating to **children**.

Family Support Clinic: One-off appointments with a volunteer Family law expert, providing information and guidance about the law relating to the client's issue and their next steps.

Family Casework: For more complex cases, or more vulnerable clients, to assist with their case in matters such as preparing position and witness statements, making applications to court, domestic abuse and care proceedings if the client is not eligible for legal aid.

Family Court Help Desk: a weekly information only service at Ipswich Magistrates' Court for people who are unrepresented in their Family matter. We offer reassurance about Court proceedings and information about our other services and other agencies.

Gender



74%

of our Family Law clients were Female

Value



£50,000

value of our *free* legal advice offered in Family Law

Domestic Abuse



43%

of our Family Law enquiries involved Domestic Abuse

SLC Family Casework



21,151 minutes of Family Law casework conducted in 2023-24

Family Court Helpdesk at Ipswich Magistrates' Court



We provided assistance, information and reassurance to **127 people** at our **Family Court Helpdesk** Service, of whom **66 told us that Domestic Abuse was a factor in their relationships.**

Family Court Helpdesk Client Quote

“ Thank you, you were so helpful. We knew nothing when we came and did not know what to expect. ”



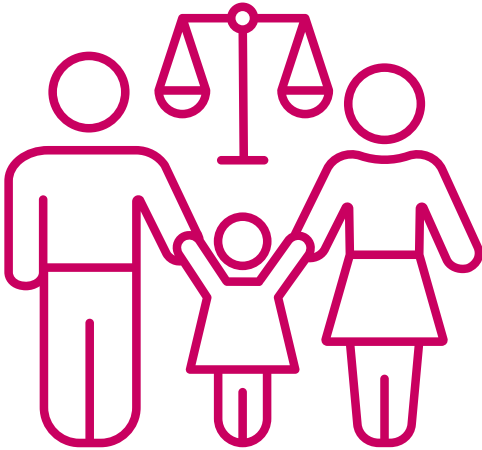
Family Case Study

Issue: Client had spent her savings on private legal advice and fallen into debt. She needed advice to deal with an application made by her ex-partner for shared care of their child. Having suffered significant domestic abuse, the client was really anxious about starting court proceedings.

What we did: Through an appointment at our Family Support Clinic, the client was advised on applying for a Non-Molestation Order and Occupation Order. As she needed further support to take these steps, our Family Casework team helped her through the process. We helped her contact Lighthouse Women's Aid for additional support.

Outcome: The client and her child were able to stay in their home and feel safe and secure.

Family Law - FSC



Family Support Clinic Client Quote

“ Before coming to Family Law, I was confused and anxious about my legal rights. After coming, I fully understand the advice given to me. The advice has been fantastic and easy to understand. I would like to thank you all for your help and advice.”

Before and After FSC Appointment

We asked people to provide a score about **how confident that they felt for each of these statements** on a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 being **Low** and 5 being **High**.

“I know what my legal rights are.”

Before FSC Appointment



After FSC Appointment



“I feel I have a say in legal decisions that affect me.”

Before FSC Appointment



After FSC Appointment



“I know what legal options are available to me.”

Before FSC Appointment



After FSC Appointment



“I know what my next steps should be to resolve my legal issues.”

Before FSC Appointment



After FSC Appointment



About Housing Law Service

Our Housing service provided free legal advice, assistance, and casework support across a range of housing and homelessness legal issues under a legal aid contract funded by the Legal Aid Agency, helping with issues including unlawful eviction, harassment and disrepair. We also provided a limited free advice service for other housing related issues. The Housing service was under considerable pressure during 2023-24, due to staffing issues that reduced capacity for some of this time.

Lucy Davies, Housing Court Advisor – Bury St. Edmunds:

Through our Legal Aid contract, we ran the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme (HPCDS)/Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service (HLPAS) at the County Court in Bury St. Edmunds, providing advice and representation to any defendant under the threat of homelessness, regardless of their financial situation. **46 litigants in person assisted at court in 2023-24.**

Partnership with Lighthouse Women’s Aid (LWA)

Lucy runs a monthly telephone advice clinic for clients of LWA seeking advice about Housing matters. This is a valuable service that offers initial advice on rights and next steps to women who have experienced domestic abuse. **In 2023-24, Lucy advised 20 LWA clients.**

Our Impact



104

Housing Law clients
assisted in 2023-24



Our Housing Law
clients were of all
ages, ranging from

19 – 80
years old.



“On behalf of my son and I, I would like to thank you so much for your time and effort yesterday at Court and the sterling job you performed; considering all the other cases you were juggling with. We were very pleased with the outcome... which I feel would not have been achieved without your performance. One again, a heartfelt thanks.”



- Housing Client

Legal Advice Clinic (LAC)

About our Service

Our **Legal Advice Clinics (LAC)** are our flag-ship pro bono service, delivered with the generous support of legal professionals from local, regional and national law firms, volunteering their time and expertise. We administer the clinics, triaging enquiries and arranging the appointments. Clinics are run on a weekly basis, offering clients a **30-minute telephone appointment**, giving initial legal advice in the following areas of law: *Discrimination; Employment; Family; Housing; Immigration; Personal Injury, Wills and Probate, and a General Law Clinic.*

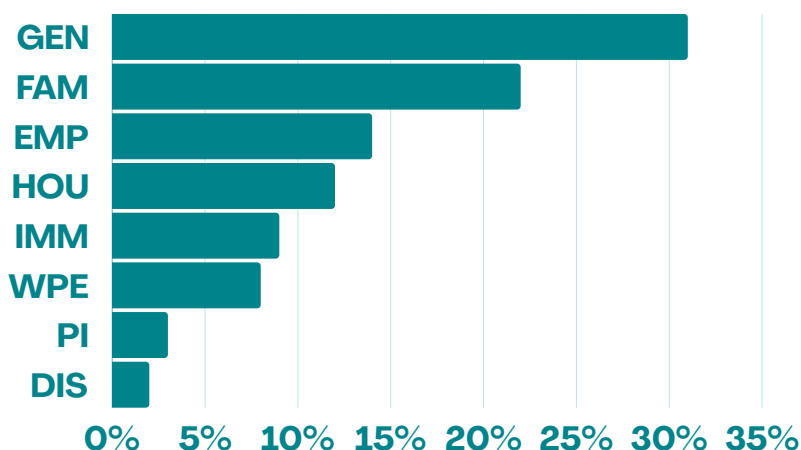
We could not run this service without the support of our legal volunteers. Over the course of 2023-24, **we were supported by 37 legal volunteers.** Alongside these, Birketts LLP support our General Law clinics through their trainee solicitors working under supervision.

Our clients and areas of law

394

clients advised by our
LAC in 2023-24

Of these clients, see the chart to the right for their **distribution** between the areas of law we offer in our **Legal Advice Clinics.**



Oliver Fuller
Barrister
Fenners Chambers



Being a volunteer at the Suffolk Law Centre has been a rewarding experience which has enabled me to give back to the community I grew up in by providing necessary and practical legal advice to those who would otherwise be unable to obtain it on such important and central aspects of people's lives as their employment, their homes and their relationships.



About our Service

Legal Triage offers expert help to unpack the ‘carrier bag’ of unresolved issues for clients whose problems have escalated. Alex Varadeu, our Legal Triage Officer, helped to identify where expert legal advice may help and gave ongoing support to assist clients to access that advice, either via Suffolk Law Centre’s own services, or referral to other providers. We are grateful to Ipswich Borough Council for funding our Legal Triage service.

Justice First Fellowship – Trainee Solicitor

We were lucky to be funded by the **Legal Education Foundation (LEF)**, starting in 2022, to host a trainee solicitor for a two year fully funded training period. The **Justice First Fellowship (JFF)** provides a wonderful opportunity for both host organisations and trainees to boost the numbers of new solicitors with experience in social welfare law. Our trainee solicitor funded under the JFF, was Karis Le Winton. She completed her training with our 3 casework teams: Discrimination, Family and Housing, giving her vital experience in these core areas of social welfare law. Karis left SLC in December 2023 to take up a Housing role at another Law Centre.

Case Study

Issue: Elderly client was involved in a very minor car accident. They had comprehensive insurance and was unsure of whose fault it was, so exchanged insurance policy information with the other party. Having not heard anything from their insurance company, they assumed the claim had been settled. Ten months later, they received Court documents informing them of Small Claims Court proceedings, as the other party was seeking costs in excess of £1,500.

What We Did: Legal Triage supported the client to contact their insurance company and retrieve information about their original claim. The client was then offered an appointment with one of our Legal Advice Clinic volunteer solicitors. Legal Triage liaised with the volunteer advisor who kindly provided follow up draft letters for the client to send to their insurance company.

Outcome: The insurance company then agreed to take over and settled the claim on the client’s behalf, with no costs involved for the client

Chair's Statement

Thank you for reading our **Impact Report 2023-24**. I hope you have found it interesting and informative.

Suffolk Law Centre strives for a just and equal society where everyone's rights are valued and protected. We do this by providing free and accessible legal advice, support, representation, information, and education to the diverse communities of Suffolk (and where possible across East Anglia), with the support of grant-funding, donations, legal and community volunteers and through innovative, local partnership working.

I am so proud to be Chair of Suffolk Law Centre. As you can see from our summary of the year, our staff and volunteers work extremely hard to ensure access to justice for people in Suffolk and surrounding counties who could not otherwise get the legal help they need.

We could not do this without some help ourselves! I would like to extend thanks from the staff and Trustees to the following:

Grant funders and foundations who have supported our work in 2023-24: AB Charitable Trust; Access to Justice Foundation; Baring Foundation; Ipswich Borough Council; Law Centres Network; Rope Trust; Suffolk Community Foundation; Suffolk County Council; Suffolk 100 Reasons; The Legal Education Foundation; The National Lottery; Tudor Trust.

Donors – to everyone who has supported our fundraisers and raised funds for us, a huge Thank You, we cannot list everyone here, but we are so grateful to every one of you! Particular thanks to: A. Girling; David & Margaret Anderson; Simon Hall; Ed Hall; Alice & Richard Palmer; Tim Parkes; Adam Signy; Richard Wells; Brendan Padfield; Eleanor Root; Sharon O'Donnell; I. Valentine.

Suffolk and North Essex Law Society (SNELS) and **Suffolk and North Essex Junior Lawyers Division (SNEJLD)** for all the amazing fundraising and profile raising at events and through 'In Touch'.

Legal Volunteers: Family Support Clinic: Carole Parry-Jones; Krystyna Hayes; Eloise Churchill. Legal Advice Clinic: Abdur Rasheed.

Legal Advice Clinics: Ashtons Law; Attwells; Birketts; East Anglian Chambers; Ellisons; Fenners Chambers; Greene & Greene; Kerseys; Prettys; 3PB; Weil Gotshal & Manges.

Community Volunteers and student placements: Anne Richardson; David Brown; Glenda Terry; Jack Huzzey; James Lemondine-Martin; Javad Ali; Jemimah Chinoko; Matthew Cole; Rosemary Goulding; Sepideh Abheri; Tammie Jones.

And last, but not least, my fellow Trustees past and present: Paul Burton, Jo Chimes, Sam Gallagher, Jemma Jones, Monica Kurnatowska, Myriam Naoual, Carole Parry-Jones, James Sandbach, Stevan Stratton.

"I really appreciate all the help and support the law centre has given me. I have had some very difficult times in my life where the law centre staff have listened to me and supported me in the best way, helping me ... I just want to say thank you very much, we all need more centres to help people. Suffolk Law Centre staff are brilliant."

- Suffolk Law Centre Client

Professor Gareth Thomas

Chair of Trustees
Suffolk Law Centre



**Suffolk
Law
Centre**



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