COMMUNITY LAW & MEDIATION

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LIMERICK

Overview of Community Law & Mediation

Community Law & Mediation Limerick is an independent community law centre and our mission is to empower communities, tackle underlying injustice and exclusion and advance rights-based changes in public policy and law.

Established in 2012, CLM Limerick offers both telephone and face-to-face legal advice clinics together with follow up legal support in community hubs across Southill, Moyross, St. Mary's Park, Ballinacurra Weston and Limerick City. It also provides free legal advice clinics in collaboration with Novas and Citizens Information Limerick, targeting support at those who need it most.

CLM Limerick supports people experiencing a wide range of issues that are core to a person's ability to live in safety and dignity: homelessness; barriers to accessing emergency accommodation and social housing; substandard housing conditions; social welfare entitlements; employment rights; discrimination; and access to health and education services.

Alongside legal advice clinics, it offers Know your Rights Talks in the community to ensure that residents and groups have a stronger understanding of the law and how to exercise their rights in practice. Its mediation service helps individuals and families resolve disputes, improve communication, and achieve more amicable solutions to their issues.

Since its opening in 2012, the work of the Limerick centre has grown substantially. Our small yet dedicated and expert team in Limerick now assists more than 600 people annually.

The challenge

CLM Limerick is the only independent community law centre outside Dublin and continues to meet a consistently high level of demand for its services. It addresses gaps in support not met by the State-funded legal aid system.

The obstacles facing those living in disadvantage, in need of legal services, are not just cost and include: Intimidation of the legal world; inaccessibility of legal services; lack of awareness of rights and the law most relevant to disadvantaged communities including amongst the legal profession; fear of not being taken seriously or of retaliation if legal action is taken; and time, including waiting times for legal aid and the time it takes for a case to be heard.

The project

This project has enabled CLM Limerick to expand its services, providing access to justice for marginalised groups living in disadvantaged areas in Limerick City and the surrounding area, via the delivery of free legal advice clinics, legal advocacy and representation, mediation, and education services to individuals and families most in need of support.

"CLM Limerick provides dedicated services for people directly from NOVAS premises in the city; this is a vital intervention for people who find it difficult to access mainstream services"

- Una Burns, NOVAS

The following are just a couple of examples that illustrate the impact our services have had on clients' lives (note, names have been changed to protect client confidentiality):

Jean's story

In 2021, Jean moved into the local authority home of her partner of almost 30 years as his physical and mental health had deteriorated significantly as a result of Covid. Jean had been on the housing list for more than 15 years without ever having received an offer of housing. A few years later, her partner passed away unexpectedly and before the couple had completed the paperwork to add Jean to the tenancy.

Eviction proceedings were issued against Jean by the local authority. As she did not earn sufficient money to rent privately her only alternative was to present as homeless. Jean was distraught when she came to our service. She was worried not only about losing her home, but that she would be unable to continue with her job as she was fearful and embarrassed that her employers would find out she was living in a homeless shelter.

We defended the eviction proceedings and Jean was able to sign a tenancy agreement to remain on in her home. Following settlement of this case she told us ***"now I have my home, and my job is safe, I can grieve my partner".***

Seamus's story

Seamus injured his back in work requiring a hospital admission. His mobility was severely impacted.

He applied for and was awarded Illness Benefit, back paid to the start of his inability to perform his duties. Some months later, the Department of Social Protection wrote to Seamus advising that they were discontinuing his payment on the basis that back pain was not a prescribed disease and as such, he did not satisfy the criteria for Illness Benefit.

On Seamus's behalf, we challenged this narrow interpretation of the criteria as it was causing him and his family significant financial hardship. We sought a review of the original decision under the Section 317 mechanism which led to the successful re-statement of Illness Benefit**.**

Find Out More

Chief Justice Donal O'Donnell speaking at CLM Limerick's 10th anniversary celebrations