

Children's Law Centre

# Annual Report

2021-22



[childrenslawcentre.org.uk](https://childrenslawcentre.org.uk)



Children's Rights  
Change Children's Lives

# Contents

Vision Mission Values	4
Chairperson's Report	5
Director's Report	6
Year in Numbers	8
Impact at a Glance	9
Advice and Information	10
Legal	14
Policy	18
Youth Participation and Advocacy	25
Communications	26
Administration and Finance	27
Accounts Overview	28
Thanks	30
Acknowledgements	31

# Vision Mission Values

## Vision

Children's rights are guaranteed without discrimination.

## Mission

Ensuring children's rights are respected, realised and vindicated through participation, partnership and representation.

## Values

- We are child centred
- We have integrity
- We are accountable
- We are rights based
- We are independent
- We promote equality



# Chairperson's Report

I was delighted to be elected as Chairperson of the Children's Law Centre's Board of Trustees in January 2022. I would like to thank David Simpson for his time and dedication as Chairperson in the previous years. His work throughout the worst of the pandemic was particularly valuable to the Centre in its efforts to protect children and young people's rights at an important time.

The year 2021-22 has been an incredibly busy and productive time for CLC's Board. With the Centre securing significant funding to assist in organisational development, the Board of Trustees undertook a substantial amount of training, development activities and consultation.

The organisational development work arrived at an opportune time, not only with the 25th anniversary of the Centre approaching but also because the Board of Trustees has recently undergone a transformation in membership. The new Trustees have brought a new perspective to the work of the board and have undertaken a great deal of work to ensure the opportunity to focus on organisational development is maximised.

Trustees have played a large role in the strategic planning process. This work is critical to ensure the Centre is in the best place possible to promote and protect children's rights now and in the future. Working alongside staff on this important work, we were pleased to attend a strategic planning day in March 2022 where we reviewed the Centre's previous achievements and began planning the strategic aims for



the next three years.

I was struck at how much the Centre had achieved in the previous period, including the continued growth in the staff expertise, the volume and importance of the legal work and the significant work achieved in digitising the service. This is made all the more impressive when considering the work required to keep the Centre operating during Covid. I am certain the strategic planning process we are going through now will put the Centre in an excellent position going in to the next 25 years. I would like to thank the trustees, the staff team, youth@CLC and all the volunteers at CLC for the work they have achieved this year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alicia Toal".

**Alicia Toal**  
Chairperson

**“I was struck at how much the Centre had achieved in the previous period, including the continued growth in the staff expertise, the volume and importance of the legal work and the significant work achieved in digitising the service”**

# Director's Report



**The year April 2021 to March 2022 began with a plea from the Children's Law Centre to put children's rights at the heart of any government plan to build back better, as society began to emerge from the worst period of Covid. Speaking alongside Monye Anyadike-Danes QC to the NI Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, CLC highlighted the opportunity in front of MLAs to finally incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law and better protect children in this jurisdiction.**

At another NI Assembly committee appearance that same month, this time at the education committee, our legal expert in special educational needs and disability law called on MLAs to 'grasp the opportunity' for meaningful SEND reform. Having spent years identifying the issues through countless reviews and inquiries, it was time to provide solutions.

**"Far from building back better, it quickly became apparent that key lessons had not been learned and a disregard of children's rights persisted"**

There can be no doubt that the gaps in children's rights and protections had been brutally exposed during Covid. The challenge was clear for everyone to see.

There was certainly no sign that pressure on children and young people was subsiding, with the CLC legal team continuing to deal with a challenging and complex caseload. The Centre also continued to take on an unprecedented level of litigation.

If anything, it was becoming clearer that many of the policies to tackle Covid had a disproportionate impact on children and young people, especially disabled and vulnerable children. In September 2021 a severely disabled child, represented by CLC, was successful in a High Court challenge of the decision to repurpose temporary respite care facilities during the pandemic.

Far from building back better, it quickly became apparent that key lessons had not been learned and a disregard of children's rights persisted. This was clearly demonstrated by the NI Executive's high street voucher scheme, where the Department for the Economy failed to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment or consultation process before announcing details of the scheme. As a result, children were excluded entirely. The Centre continues to assist a young person through the Equality Commission's formal complaints process, representing the first ever child to take a complaint to the Equality Commission.

Developments at UK Government level placed children's rights in even more peril. The New Plan for Immigration announced by the UK Home Office signalled the largest departure from the 1951 Refugee Convention since it was first ratified. The CLC immigration solicitors continued to raise concerns around the impact this would have on newcomer children in this jurisdiction, as well as the impact it would have on devolved matters such as anti-trafficking and child protection.

In December 2021, the UK Government also published a consultation on reforming the Human Rights Act. This is the most serious threat to children's rights in over 20 years. Challenging attempts to weaken provisions in the Human Rights Act became a major piece of work for the Centre, working alongside a wide coalition of other organisations across the UK.

Despite the challenging context, CLC has nevertheless been working diligently to protect children and young people. At CLC's 2021 Annual Lecture in November, the Centre once again brought together members of the judiciary, practitioners, decision makers, officials and NGOs to discuss how legal protections can be strengthened for victims of child trafficking. We were very pleased to have the lecture delivered by Professor Siobhán Mullally, the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, Especially in Women and Children.

That same month, CLC also launched 'Tracing the Review' alongside Include Youth, VOYPIC and NIACRO. Tracing the Review highlighted the lack of progress around youth justice reform and was launched at an event at Parliament Buildings. The event was opened by the Chairperson of the Justice Committee, with the Justice Minister responding to the report. In total, the Centre delivered twelve events or training sessions. The year closed in March 2022 with the launch of 'Rights Here, Right Now', a youth survey conducted by youth@CLC to inform the alternative youth report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The youth report will continue to provide youth@

CLC with important information on young people's understanding of and attitudes towards children's rights.

In the year 2021, CLC secured significant funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to assist in organisational development. The funding enabled the Centre to undertake what is proving to be the most thorough and participatory strategic planning process it has ever been through. As CLC moves into its 25th year, the organisational development process will set the Centre up for another successful 25 years into the future.

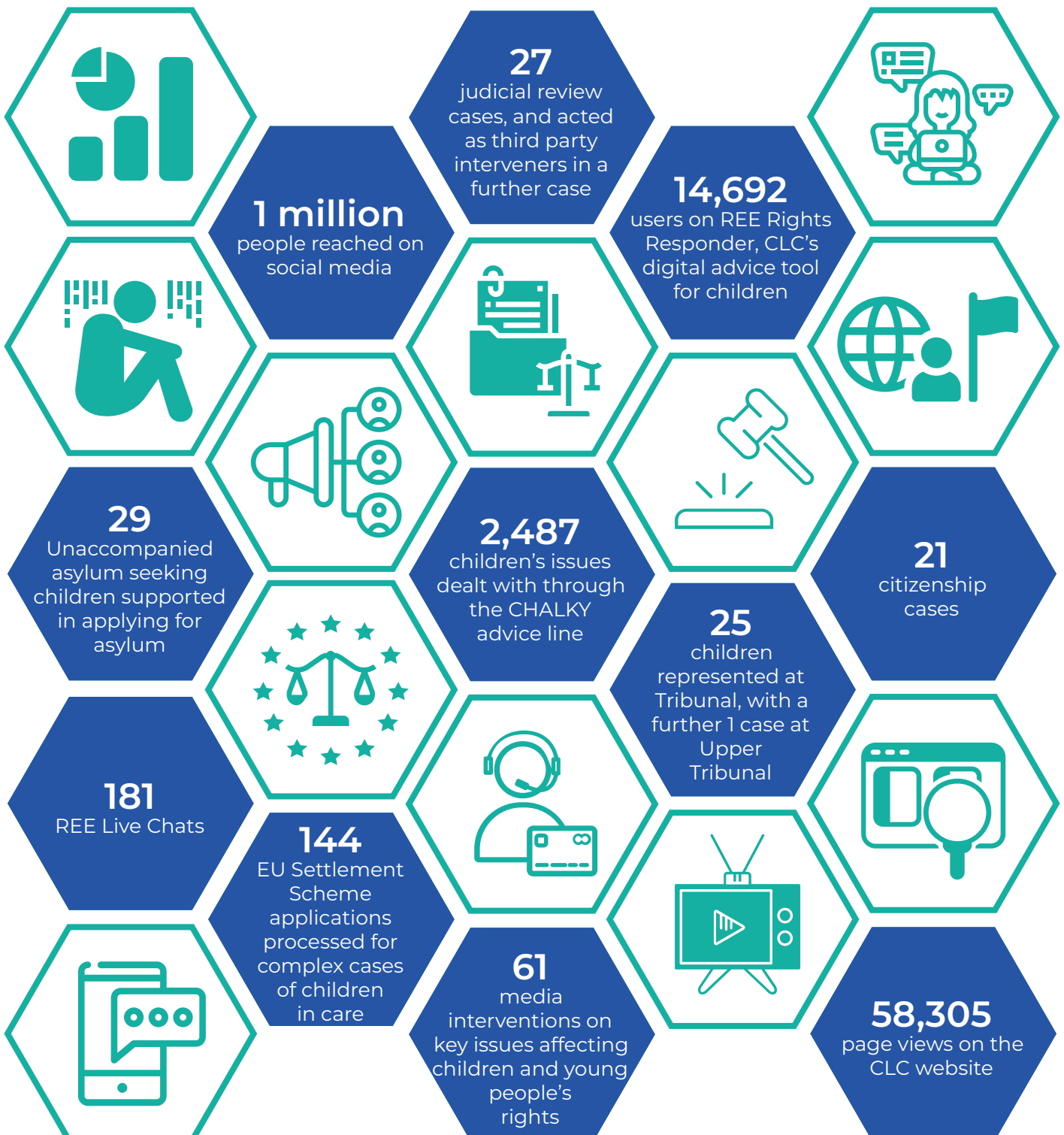
Finally, late in the year, the Centre continued its growth with the addition of a new Policy and Public Affairs Manager. This is another significant step towards maximising the influence and impact of the Centre and added to our growing team of expert staff.



**Paddy Kelly**  
Director

**“Challenging attempts to weaken provisions in the Human Rights Act became a major piece of work for the Centre”**

# Year in Numbers





# Impact at a Glance

## Successful Respite Decision



Successful legal challenge on the decision to repurpose a temporary respite care facility. Continue to challenge systemic failures.

## Led Against Discrimination



Led the public campaign against the exclusion of children from the High Street Voucher Scheme, supporting complaints by children.

## Gave Children a Voice



Gathered survey responses on matters affecting over 1,000 children, alongside workshops of over 130 harder to reach children.

## Influenced Restraint Report



Brought legal expertise to support the campaign against unlawful restraint. Influenced key recommendations in a final report.

## Delivered Prestigious Lecture



The 2021 annual lecture was successfully delivered to a range of esteemed guests, senior members of the judiciary and streamed online.

## Leading Voice on SEND



Recognised as a leading voice of expertise on systemic and emerging issues facing children with special education needs and disabilities.

## Defended Human Rights



Worked with organisations across the UK and Ireland to protect rights under attack. Presented to the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights.

## Set the standard on EUSS



Identified 144 complex cases of children in care and successfully assisted in their applications, setting the UK standard for similar cases.

## We Increased Our Impact

In the year 2021-22 CLC increased the impact of the work being carried out on behalf of children and young people. We reached more people than ever before, dealt with more issues through the advice service, and took on an unprecedented level of litigation.

**+146**

more issues dealt with through CHALKY

**+11,464**

more users on REE Rights Responder



**+33,257**

more page views on the CLC website

**Highest**

number of judicial review cases ever taken

# Advice and Information



The CHALKY advice team continued to deal with increased pressures as a result of the Covid pandemic and policy decisions taken during the Covid lockdowns. There was an increase in the number of CHALKY issues dealt with, as well as an increase in the complexity of individual cases.

Special education needs remained a significant proportion of the work carried out by the advice team, however there was also an increase around issues like anxiety in children, following the immense pressures felt by children and young people during the pandemic.

REE Rights Responder and REE Live Chat saw an increase of activity, with over 11,000 additional users compared to the previous year.

## Our CHALKY Advice Team Made A Difference

Last year CHALKY, our freephone advice line, dealt with 2,487 children's rights issues. This included queries relating to:



1,699

Education, disability and discrimination



374

Family Law



52

Human Rights and Justice



112

Care



51

Mental Health



199

Other Issues

**“Thank you for your support and guidance. We were lost at what to do but you helped us get to where we are today.”**

- Parent of a year 10 pupil helped by CLC

### REE Rights Responder

In the year 2021-22, REE Rights Responder provided legal information and advice to children and young people online, reaching them where they live their lives:



**14,692**

Users



**17,973**

Sessions



**56,109**

Messages

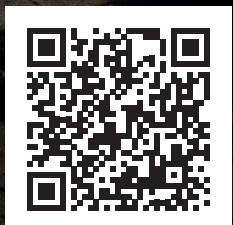


**181**

Live Chats

**WHATEVER YOUR QUESTION  
ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS, ASK REE.**

Always there, always safe, always right,  
always anonymous, always confidential, never judgemental.



## Advice in Action

### Impact in Focus: Specificity of Statement

One family of a child with significant special educational needs had previously received advice from CLC in respect of a statutory assessment, with the family being helped to a successful appeal hearing. The Education Authority subsequently issued a statement in respect of the child but there were issues with the clarity of the adult support and placement to be provided. The CLC advice team assisted further by lodging an appeal, and were able to negotiate a resolution for the child while avoiding the need for a hearing.

#### Outcome 1

The child received appropriate support in the placement of choice

### Impact in Focus: Literacy Support

The mother of a young pupil in primary five contacted the advice team because her son was really struggling at school. CLC staff assisted in securing a statutory assessment which subsequently indicated significant difficulty with dyslexia and other difficulties. A statement of special education needs was issued, but with no direct provision from the Education Authority literacy service to address the dyslexia. CLC staff assisted the parent with an appeal and agreed to represent the child at a Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal.

#### Outcome 2

The child was awarded 45 minutes each week of direct one to one teaching from a specialist teacher

### Impact in Focus: Mental Health and Educational Inclusion

In a case which combined difficult mental health issues, extreme anxiety and low school attendance, the CLC advice team was requested to intervene on behalf of the young person. The advice team arranged a series of meetings and discussions involving a range of professionals, arguing for additional help and support in the child's best interests.

#### Outcome 3

A package of exceptional teaching arrangements and additional family support was secured. The child also received an elevated level of input from the regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

## Frontline to Influence

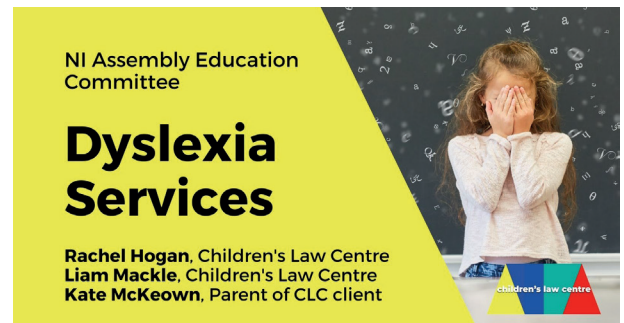
The CLC advice team work with children and young people on the front line regularly to ensure they have suitable access to dyslexia services. As leading experts in the field around educational inclusion and access to education for children with dyslexia, the team was invited to present to the NI Assembly's Education Committee in October 2021. This was an opportunity for CLC's Advice Manager and SENDIST Representative to directly highlight frontline issues, as well as offer practical solutions based on their legal and policy expertise.

On this occasion, however, it was also an opportunity to give those with expertise by experience a platform to engage directly with politicians. CLC invited Kate McKeown, the parent of Aidan, a boy who had been represented by CLC, to join them at the committee hearing. Kate was able to demonstrate exactly what it meant for her son Aidan to be failed by the Education Authority, leaving her 'stressed out of her mind'.

Speaking about Aidan's experience, Kate told the committee: "He couldn't actually do the work that he was given, he couldn't work independently, he was always in a constant state of anxiety, he was really sick in his tummy every day," she said.

"I had great problems actually getting him into school."

Aidan had been represented by CLC's Advice Manager, Liam Mackle, a year earlier, which resulted in the award of two literacy support sessions per week after a Tribunal hearing.

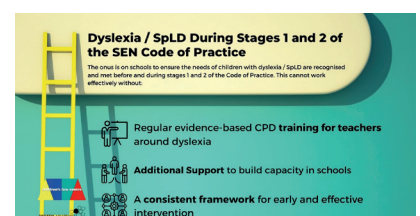


At the committee, Kate read a statement to the committee members, written by her son Aidan, explaining the impact in his own words.

Aidan's statement read: "Mum, I could do no work. I used to sit and look out the window, I couldn't do anything or join in the class... I felt left out, I felt sad, I felt stupid and lots of times I felt like crying."

He then wrote about the impact it had after receiving the support: "I can write, I can read books... It still takes a bit longer to do work but I'm good at maths."

The CLC SENDIST Representative, Rachel Hogan, then called for improvements in the literacy support service saying: "The key issue is failure of early intervention and children having to wait for very lengthy periods to receive help and support."



# Legal



In 2021-22 the CLC legal team continued to work through a heavy and increasingly complex caseload as a result of restrictions placed upon children and young people during Covid restrictions. This added to additional pressures already apparent through decades of failure to implement child rights compliant decisions.



## Protecting Children and Young People

Our legal team fought to protect children and young people's human rights and ensure they could access services. Key issues included:



### Respite Care

Judicial review cases against the failure to provide temporary respite care services for severely disabled children.



### Delayed Discharge

The failure to discharge severely disabled children because of a lack of sufficient support in the community.



### SEND Provision

We continued to represent children with special education needs and disabilities at Tribunal.



### EU Settlement

We worked to identify and process EU Settlement Scheme applications for complex cases of children in care.



### Newcomer Children

CLC represented the majority of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Northern Ireland.

## Education

**Special education needs and disability remains a large area of work for the Centre, with the CLC legal team recognised as an important resource and leading experts in the field.**

Routine appeals to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal continued, with the Centre continuing to act as champion for children failed by the Education Authority. Specificity of statements, placement and adult support all remained key problems.

The Centre's legal team continued to identify issues early in relation to the impact of Covid restrictions on vulnerable children. In September 2021 the team once again warned that children with special needs and disabilities were being forgotten in the response to new waves of Covid.

The warning came after reports of disabled children facing severe negative impacts as a result of exclusion from education settings due to direct contact tracing or testing positive for Covid.

The impact of the team's work was also brought into focus when a previous client, Reuben, matriculated into Cambridge University. Reuben was pleased to recognise the support he had received from CLC.



### Impact in Focus

#### CLC Case Recognised in Liberty Campaign

**With the threat to human rights protections in the UK growing, CLC was pleased to contribute to a campaign co-ordinated by Liberty to highlight people who have used judicial review as a tool to stand up to power and hold statutory bodies to account for their failings.**

The campaign highlighted the success of Ian, a six year old boy who loves school, but without judicial review, might not be

getting any schooling at all.

Ian has autism, but the school he was attending didn't have the resources to meet his needs. He couldn't cope and found school overwhelming. His autistic behaviours escalated.

Ian's mum, Magda, said: "With Ian's whole education at risk, we began legal proceedings. After that, Ian was given the extra support he needs and is now happy and settled at school."

## Mental Health

The year 2021-22 was an exceptionally busy year for the Centre's mental health solicitors, with an unprecedented number of judicial review cases ongoing. The solicitors continued to tackle historical systemic issues such as the crisis in respite care provision and the delayed discharge of patients from specialist hospital care.

In September 2021, CLC Solicitor Emma-Rose Duffy, secured a successful decision in relation to the failure of a health and social care trust to provide temporary respite care to a child.

The mental health solicitors at CLC continue to work on a number of important respite and delayed discharge cases, working to ensure children with complex needs get access to the services they are entitled to.



### Impact In Focus

#### Trust Breached Statutory Duty To Disabled Child Over Covid Respite Care Decision

In September 2021, a severely disabled child, represented by the Children's Law Centre, was successful in a High Court challenge of the decision to repurpose temporary respite care facilities during Covid.

The decision to repurpose the facility was made in March 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic, leaving vulnerable children without essential care. Over 50 families are

thought to have been affected by similar decisions across the five Health and Social Care Trusts.

After the decision, the child's mother said: "I am absolutely ecstatic with the outcome of the case. After many difficult months I feel a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. I welcome the decision which I feel has been long overdue for families like us. I hope this will have many positive implications on future services."





# Immigration

**It was a big year for the immigration solicitors at CLC, with the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children increasing and the deadline for the EU Settlement Scheme in June 2021.**

The Centre's work on identifying and processing 144 complex EU Settlement Scheme applications for children in care was recognised as leading across the UK. The immigration team also went further to raise awareness and concerns around the impact of failing to apply for children more generally ahead of the deadline.

During this busy time key work also continued around issues like asylum, the human trafficking of children, and citizenship applications.

In October 2021, the success of the Centre's immigration work was recognised when a previous client, who had been helped as an unaccompanied asylum seeking child, wrote to the Lord Mayor of Belfast to outline how well they had settled into the city. The letter was read to the council chamber at the commencement of the meeting.



Dear Lord Mayor,

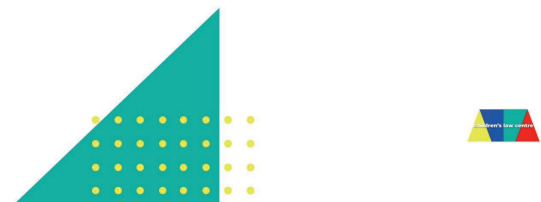
I am so glad to get an opportunity like this to express my personal view about modern city of Belfast. I have been living here for one year and half it was enough time to get know with Belfast and its residents. Every thing I mentioning in this letter is based on facts and reality no over compliment or fake. Me myself I love every thing about Belfast. The city is beautiful, clean, well designed and safe. What I like most Belfast is the people they all are friendly and sociable.

I don't think Belfast is missing something significant. Guys you put too much effort on this city to look like is today. To me Belfast is flawless city. I have been working so hard to find some cons on Belfast but I haven't found anything serious.

As I mentioned before Belfast is beyond perfection. But if you asked me personally what Belfast needs I would say Belfast needs smart toilets in a public areas. They are not that important, but you need them anyway.

That is everything stay in peace and love keep it real and genuine.

Sincerely,



## Annual Lecture

**Responding to Child Trafficking: Rights Vs Rhetoric**

**The 2021 Annual Lecture was delivered by Professor Siobhán Mullally the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, Especially in Women and Children. It was kindly chaired by the Honourable Mr Justice Scofield.**

Speaking ahead of the lecture, Professor Mullally outlined concerns around the UK Government's changes to immigration rules saying: "Immigration practitioners and human rights organisations have consistently raised concerns that the identification of victims of trafficking will become more difficult. Indeed, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner has also made this very point."



# Policy

It was an extremely busy year for the policy team at CLC. With the return of the NI Assembly in the previous year, the volume of consultations, policy reviews and strategic plans increased. With the significant increase in Assembly activity, the Policy Officer worked hard to ensure children's rights were placed at the heart of the decision making process.

At the end of the year, the policy team was also pleased to welcome a new Policy and Public Affairs Manager, adding additional resources and ensuring CLC's influence with decision makers continues to grow into the future.

**CLC expertise was called upon a number of times to present oral evidence and answer questions at NI Assembly scrutiny committees:**

## April 2021

- Presented evidence to the Education Committee to scrutinise the Education Authority's SEND Improvement Process.
- Presented evidence to the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights for NI.

## June 2021

- Presented evidence to the Education

Committee on the Revised SEND Framework.

- Presented evidence to the Education Committee on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Reporting Process.

## October 2021

- Presented evidence to the Education Committee on Dyslexia Support Services.

## Collaboration

**CLC staff sit on a range of bodies and groups to ensure children's rights considerations are at the heart of policy and practice. These include, but are not limited to:**

- The Safeguarding Board NI
- Joint Consultative Forum for the Education Sector
- DOH Reference Group on Mental Health and Capacity Legislation
- Family Mediation NI
- Human Rights Consortium
- Social Security Practitioner's Forum
- PSNI Youth Champion Fora
- Independent Advice Support and Mediation Service Reference Group
- Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance
- Mental Health and Community Care Practitioners Forum
- All Party Group on Children and Young People
- All Party Group on Children with Learning Disabilities
- All Party Group on Suicide Prevention
- All Party Group on Mental Health
- NI Anti-Bullying Forum
- Anti-Poverty Strategy Co-Design Group
- PSNI Stop and Search Working Group
- NICCY Equal Protection NGO Working Group
- Child Poverty Alliance
- Brexit and Human Rights Working Group
- Equality Coalition

## Policy Responses

- Written Evidence to the Ad Hoc Committee on A Bill of Rights for NI
- Written Evidence to the Education Committee on the Education Authority's SEND Improvement Plan
- Response to the Regional Service for Separated and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- Response to the Police Service NI's Equality Impact Assessment on the Use of Spit and Bite Guards
- Response to the UK Home Office's New Plan for Immigration
- Response to the NI Executive's Programme for Government Equality Impact Assessment
- Response to the Department of Health's Consultation on Extending Temporary Covid Modifications to Children's Social Care Regulations
- Written evidence to the Justice Committee Call for Evidence on Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill
- Response to the Consultation on the Approval of Minor Court Settlements
- Briefing on the Nationality and Borders Bill
- Written Evidence to the Education Committee on the Revised SEND Framework
- Evidence to the Education Committee on the UNCRC Reporting Process
- Briefing on the EU Settlement Scheme Deadline and Implications for Children
- Response to the Department of Health's Consultation on the Regional Service for Separated and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- Response to the Department of Education's Consultation on Deferring School Starting Age
- Written Evidence to the Education Committee on Dyslexia Support Services
- Response to the Department of Health's Consultation on Restrictive Practices
- Tracing the Review: Developments in Youth Justice in NI 2011-21
- Joint Briefing on Equal Protection for Children in NI
- Response to the SENDIST (Amendment) Regulations 2021
- Response to Amendments to the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority
- Response to the Department for Communities' Housing Supply Strategy
- Response to the Department of Education's Children and Young People's Strategy Delivery Plan
- Response to the Education Authority's Equality Scheme
- Response to the Department of Justice's Consultation on Policing Oversight and Accountability Arrangements and Police Ombudsman's Powers
- Response to the Ministry of Justice's Review of the Human Rights Act
- Response to the Executive Office's Draft Refugee Integration Strategy
- Response to the PPSNI's Guidelines for Prosecuting Cases Involving Electronic Communications
- Response to the Department of Finance's Consultation on Marriage Law
- Response to the Independent Review of Education
- Response to the UK Government's State Response to the UNCRC List of Issues

## Human Rights Under Attack



The year 2021-22 saw increased tension around the local and national frameworks for protecting human rights. Locally, the Northern Ireland Protocol, an outworking of the impact of Brexit, became a divisive political issue. The NI Protocol was, among other things, a mechanism for protecting the framework of human rights provided by the Good Friday Agreement. With threats to trigger Article 16 of the NI protocol often at the centre of the debate, the threats to human rights protections was often a live issue, and the impact this would have on children and young people a serious concern.

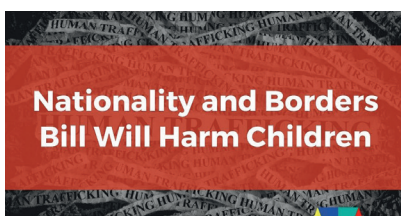
The Centre was increasingly concerned that children's rights would be negatively impacted and the voice of children and young people was being lost. To address this, CLC teamed up with Children's Rights Alliance Ireland to commission expert academic research into the implications of Brexit and the protocol and to engage with children and young people directly to hear their views.

During this time work was also being undertaken by the NI Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights for Northern

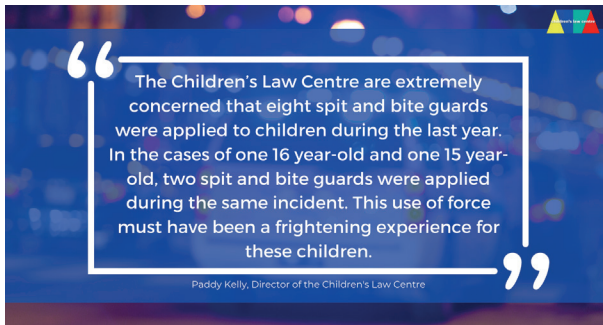
Ireland. The committee was set up as a direct result of the 'New Decade, New Approach' deal which restored the devolved institutions and was a significant recognition of the role that human rights plays in peace and stability. In April 2021, CLC attended the ad hoc committee to present evidence on how a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland could provide a mechanism for incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law.

Meanwhile, the UK Government was consistently threatening the diminution of rights by targeting key and long-standing pillars of human rights protections both nationally and internationally. In May 2021 the CLC immigration solicitors responded to the Home Office's 'New Plan for Immigration', which set in motion a significant departure from the 1951 Refugee Convention. By the end of 2021 the UK Government had launched its review of the Human Rights Act, with CLC submitting a response challenging the diminution of rights in March 2022.

The Children's Law Centre continues to work with organisations across the UK and Ireland on defending human rights and protecting the rights of children.



## Key Issues in Focus



### Police Accountability on Spit and Bite Guards

CLC worked alongside Amnesty International, CAJ and Include Youth to challenge the introduction of spit and bite guards, also known as spit hoods, by the PSNI. CLC raised concerns with the NI Policing Board, the NI Children's Commissioner, the Equality Commission for NI, the NI Human Rights Commission, the Police Ombudsman for NI and directly with the Police Service NI.

#### Outcomes

- The Chief Constable accepted there was no medical evidence to support the introduction of spit hoods during the Covid pandemic.
- A report from the Policing Board's Human Rights Adviser in November 2020 recommended an end to the use of spit hoods.
- Publication of an Equality Impact Assessment highlighted adverse impacts on children.

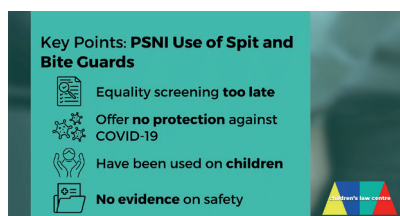
### Leading Experts on SEND Improvements

In the year 2021-22, the team at CLC continued to provide leading expertise in relation to the issues facing children with special educational needs and disabilities. Building on front line knowledge of the issues within the Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) system, the team has been called upon to provide solutions, scrutinise the SEND improvement process and help shape legislation, policy and practice.

The team at CLC was called on to present to the NI Assembly's Education Committee three times in the year to provide MLAs with solutions and guidance on how to improve the SEND system and to scrutinise the Education Department's new revised SEND framework. The Centre's SENDIST expert also sat on the Education Authority's Education Welfare Service Project Reference Group and the SEND Strategic Development Programme Reference Group.

#### Outcomes

- Service delivery model reviewed to



improve the impact on children.

- Work to develop an outcomes based accountability framework, with final report to be produced.
- Business case approved for phase one of improvement projects.
- Funding of £6.1 million secured to enable work on 13 prioritised SEND improvement projects, including reviews of early years and educational psychology, a statutory assessment improvement project and a placement project.
- CLC actively supporting as 'Critical Friend' to the Education Authority.

The Children's Law Centre led on a public campaign to raise the concerns of children and young people who were excluded. The Centre became recognised as the leading voice for children and young people on the issue and assisted a young person in bringing a complaint to the Equality Commission. This represented the first ever complaint of its kind brought by someone under 18.

### Outcomes

- The Children's Law Centre led a public campaign to raise public awareness, bringing other key organisations on board.
- The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland agreed to investigate the first ever complaint of its kind by a person under 18.
- A full decision on the investigation is to be made public in early 2023.



### Challenging Age Discrimination Through the High Street Voucher Scheme

In 2020, the NI Department for the Economy announced a Covid recovery scheme which would see individuals awarded a £100 voucher to spend on the high street. However, the scheme failed to include children, with the department failing to fulfil its duties to carry out an equality screening exercise and consultation to assess the impact on groups, including children.



### Immigration

2021-22 saw the immigration solicitors in the Centre significantly increase their policy



output. Quickly becoming a vital resource with leading expertise in the sector locally, the immigration solicitors at CLC provided expert input to a number of consultations. These included the UK Home Offices 'New Plan for Immigration' in May 2021; a briefing paper on the EU Settlement Scheme in June 2021; a response to a consultation on the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority in November 2021; a briefing note on the Nationality and Borders Bill in September 2021; and a response to the Draft Refugee Strategy 2022-27 in February 2022.

### Outcomes

- Local expert led policy interventions were available to highlight NI specific issues relating to immigration and asylum, filling a significant gap.



### Restrictive Practices

Following concerning reports of the unlawful use of restraint practices in school settings on children with special education needs and disabilities, CLC worked to raise

concerns around the existing framework and guidance on restrictive practices, which had led to instances where the human rights of vulnerable children had been seriously violated.

The Centre's SENDIST Representative was appointed to the Department of Education's reference group and the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People's advisory group to inform the report recommendations.

The report was finalised in early 2022, with CLC calling for an urgent need for legislative reform, clear statutory guidance and monitoring practices.

### Outcomes

- The independent report made six recommendations, including repeal of Article 4 (1)(c) of the Education (NI) Order 1998 and outlined the need for statutory guidance.
- The report recognised children's rights under the UNCRC within the recommendations.



## Equality and Non-Discrimination

A key aspect of CLC's policy and legal work was to raise awareness around the equality duties to be fulfilled by statutory bodies under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, pushing for better implementation to protect children from discrimination

## Event: 'Tracing the Review'

In November 2021, CLC, along with Include Youth, Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) and NIACRO, launched 'Tracing the Review', an expert lead research report commissioned by CLC, Include Youth, Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) and NIACRO. The report tracked the progress of several key recommendations made a decade ago in the Youth Justice Review.

The report drew particular attention to the lack of progress in relation to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility. It also outlined a number of key findings, including the need to ensure compliance with children's rights and human rights standards.

Northern Ireland has one of the lowest ages of criminal responsibility in Europe, and indeed the world. The recommendation to raise the age of criminal responsibility is one of the key elements of the Youth Justice Review ten years ago but it has remained unimplemented. The UNCRC clearly recommends raising the age to 16 and the NI Executive has a duty to comply with UNCRC obligations.

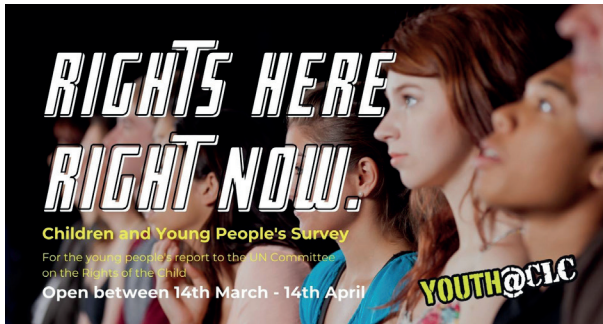


### Outcome

After the launch of 'Tracing the Review' the Department of Justice launched a consultation to review the minimum age of criminal responsibility



# Youth Participation and Advocacy



The year 2021-22 saw continued pressures on youth@CLC due to Covid restrictions and the impact they were having on children and young people's lives, particularly as a result of school disruption and isolation.

Nonetheless, youth@CLC continued to engage with decision makers to ensure the voice of children and young people was being heard in matters affecting them. This included providing evidence to the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People's report into the impact of Covid on children. Youth panel members also took

part in a consultation on a four year strategy for the Safeguarding Board, facilitated by the National Children's Bureau.

Three members of the youth panel submitted complaints to the Equality Commission following their exclusion from the High Street Voucher Scheme. This was a key part of the wider campaign being led by CLC to oppose plans by the Department for the Economy to exclude people under the age of 18 from the scheme.

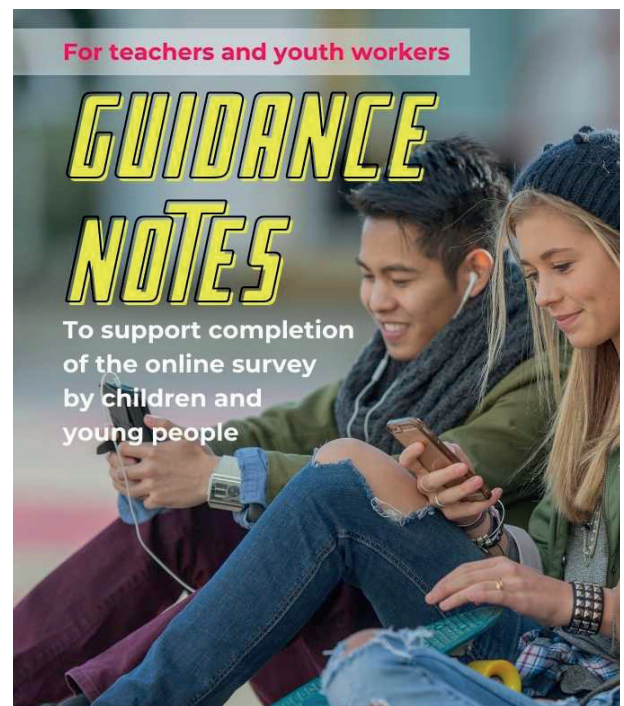
The end of the year also saw youth@CLC prepare for the development of a youth report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child by launching their children and young people's survey 'Rights Here, Right Now'. Work also got underway on a series of workshops, led by CLC's Youth Participation and Advocacy Worker and members of the youth panel, to collect the thoughts and views of harder to reach children and young people for the report.

## Children's Voices Being Heard

In March 2021, youth@CLC launched a major survey of children and young people in Northern Ireland to collect their views on matters that impact them, and their knowledge of children's rights.

The survey was circulated to schools, youth clubs and children's organisations across Northern Ireland, along with extensive capacity building materials for children, young people and adults. The survey was accompanied by an extensive two month online campaign.

The survey received over 1,000 responses and will inform a youth report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.



# Communications

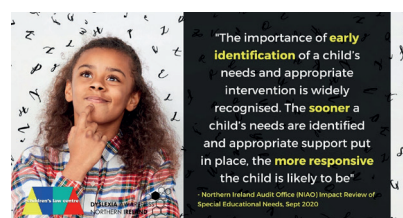


Other areas of focus included working alongside the Centre's SENDIST Representative to secure meaningful reforms to the special education needs framework in schools.

Collaboration with other specialist organisations to increase the impact of public campaigns was also a key feature. This included work alongside Dyslexia Awareness Northern Ireland to raise concerns around the impact of dyslexia on children in schools; work with Angel Eyes to raise awareness of issues facing visually impaired children in schools; and work with Amnesty International, the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) and Include Youth to challenge the use of spit and bite guards in Northern Ireland.

The communications output from CLC continued to grow in the year 2021-22, with the Centre leading on a number of public awareness campaigns.

Immigration became a key area of focus, with consistent attacks on the human rights framework for protecting refugee and asylum seeking children.



## Growing Impact

In 2021-22, CLC reached more people than ever before



61

Media Interventions



58,305

Website page views



33,086

Users on the website



1,067,553

People reached on social media



60%

Increase in social media followers

# Administration and Finance

**The Administration and Finance team worked to oversee the smooth running of the organisation. This included work to secure new and ongoing funding to ensure the continued operation of the Centre.**

The work carried out in the background of the organisation by the small team of staff in the Administration and Finance team cannot be underestimated. Preparing financial information, providing well-functioning and protected IT systems, looking after the health and safety of the team, and providing support for the Board of Trustees allows the rest of the team to perform well in their roles and protect children and young people.



## Strengthening the Organisation

### Paul Hamlyn Foundation Supports CLC's Organisational Development

**In 2021 CLC was delighted to secure significant funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to support organisational development.**

With CLC celebrating 25 years since it was first established, the new support provided

an opportunity to prepare the organisation for the next 25 years. This included support to recruit and train a new Board of Trustees, the appointment of a consultant to assist in the strategic development process, and the recruitment of a new Head of Operations.

CLC would like to thank the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for their support and belief in the organisation.



# Accounts Overview

	Unrestricted funds 2022 £	Restricted funds 2022 £	Total 2022 £	Unrestricted funds 2021 £	Restricted funds 2021 £	Total 2021 £
<b><u>Income and endowments from:</u></b>						
Donations and legacies	384	-	384	506	-	506
Charitable activities	54,154	853,081	907,235	35,698	962,786	998,484
Investments	36,178	-	36,178	38,191	-	38,191
Movement in pension provision	829	-	829	61,138	-	61,138
<b>Total income</b>	<b>91,545</b>	<b>853,081</b>	<b>944,626</b>	<b>135,533</b>	<b>962,786</b>	<b>1,098,319</b>
<b><u>Expenditure on:</u></b>						
Charitable activities	43,016	755,210	798,226	37,582	653,189	690,771
<b>Net incoming resources before transfers</b>	<b>48,529</b>	<b>97,871</b>	<b>146,400</b>	<b>97,951</b>	<b>309,597</b>	<b>407,548</b>
Gross transfers between funds	(9,381)	9,381	-	141,431	(141,431)	-
<b>Net income for the year/ Net movement in funds</b>	<b>39,148</b>	<b>107,252</b>	<b>146,400</b>	<b>239,382</b>	<b>168,166</b>	<b>407,548</b>
Fund balances at 1 April 2021	277,469	526,081	803,550	38,087	357,915	396,002
<b>Fund balances at 31 March 2022</b>	<b>316,617</b>	<b>633,333</b>	<b>949,950</b>	<b>277,469</b>	<b>526,081</b>	<b>803,550</b>

## Full Accounts Available

A full copy of the CLC accounts for the year 2021-22 can be made available on request

## Accounts Overview (continued)

	2022		2021	
	£	£	£	£
<b>Fixed assets</b>				
Intangible assets		31,848		52,613
Tangible assets		249,596		259,137
Investment properties		214,000		214,000
		<u>495,444</u>		<u>525,750</u>
<b>Current assets</b>				
Debtors	145,298		78,119	
Cash at bank and in hand	553,881		510,071	
		<u>699,179</u>		<u>588,190</u>
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>				
		<u>(63,429)</u>		<u>(109,334)</u>
<b>Net current assets</b>		<u>635,750</u>		<u>478,856</u>
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>		<u>1,131,194</u>		<u>1,004,606</u>
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year</b>				
		(156,352)		(170,810)
<b>Provisions for liabilities</b>				
Defined benefit pension liability	24,892		30,246	
		<u>(24,892)</u>		<u>(30,246)</u>
<b>Net assets</b>		<u><u>949,950</u></u>		<u><u>803,550</u></u>

	2022		2021	
	£	£	£	£
<b>Income funds</b>				
Restricted funds		633,333		526,081
<u>Unrestricted funds</u>				
Designated funds	10,165		10,165	
General unrestricted funds	331,344		297,550	
Pension reserve	(24,892)		(30,246)	
		<u>316,617</u>		<u>277,469</u>
		<u><u>949,950</u></u>		<u><u>803,550</u></u>

# Thanks



**The Children's Law Centre would like to thank it's hard working staff, youth panel, volunteers and Board of Trustees for their continued and unrelenting commitment to protecting the rights of children.**

Their hard work and commitment ensured children's rights, are not ignored. Children are, without doubt, better off because of it.

Funders continue to show a great deal of support in assisting the Centre to meet the growing needs of children and young people. Without their support, the CLC staff would not be able to complete the work it does.

In the year 2021-22, the Centre undertook a significant piece of work to develop the organisation's governance structures. Particular thanks must be given to everyone who took an active role in supporting that work. It will place the Centre in a better more sustainable place going into the future.

## We would like to pay particular thanks to our funders for the year:

- Department of Health
- Health & Social Care Board
- Department of Education
- BBC Children in Need
- Angel Eyes
- Esmee Fairbairn
- Legal Education Foundation
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- The National Lotteries Community Fund
- Children's Rights Alliance Research
- Access to Justice
- Department for Communities
- The Baring Foundation
- Department of Justice – ARCS

# Acknowledgements

## Staff

- Emma-Rose Duffy (Solicitor)
- Diane Hammond (Advice Worker)
- Rachel Hogan (SENDIST Representative)
- Paddy Kelly (Director)
- Claire Kemp (Policy Officer)
- Liam Mackle (Advice Manager)
- Catherine Maguire (Advice Worker)
- Sarah McAuley (Receptionist / Admin Assistant)
- Maria McCloskey (Immigration Solicitor)
- Fergal McFerran (Policy and Public Affairs Manager)
- Eamonn McNally (Mental Health Solicitor)
- Sinead McSorley (Youth Participation and Advocacy Worker)
- Barbara Muldoon (Immigration Solicitor)
- Sam Nelson (Communications and Marketing Manager)
- Helen Rafferty (Head of Administration and Finance)
- Kathryn Stevenson (Head of Legal Services)

## youth@CLC

- Angus Bolton
- Lauren Campbell
- Niamh Craig
- Lauren Duffy
- James Flanagan
- Morgen Henderson
- Sarah Kelly
- Erin Marris
- Jay Martin
- Eilidh O'Connor
- Conor Reilly
- Daniel Walls
- Saorla White

## Independent Consultants

- Dr Deena Haydon
- Brenda Kelly
- Deirdre McAliskey

## Board of Trustees

- Muriel Spence
- Yvonne Campbell
- Trása Canavan
- Duane Farrell
- Jerome Finnegan
- Amanda Stewart
- Shirelle Stewart
- Alicia Toal



# Children's Law Centre

Rights House  
2nd Floor  
127 - 131 Ormeau Road  
Belfast, BT7 1SH

Tel: 028 9024 5704  
Fax: 028 9024 5679  
Email: [info@childrenslawcentre.org](mailto:info@childrenslawcentre.org)

**CHALKY Freephone Advice Line:**  
0808 808 5678  
[chalky@childrenslawcentre.org](mailto:chalky@childrenslawcentre.org)

**REE Rights Responder**  
#Ask REE at [reerights.com](http://reerights.com)

The Children's Law Centre is a charity and can accept donations to support our work.

If you are a UK taxpayer, Gift Aid your donation and we can claim back an extra 25p from your taxes for every £1 you donate. Donate securely online at [www.cafonline.org](http://www.cafonline.org) by selecting Children's Law Centre under 'find a charity' or send your donation directly to Children's Law Centre.

Children's Law Centre is a company limited by guarantee.

Charity Registration No. NIC101148  
Company Registration No. NI033998 (Northern Ireland)

The logo for Children's Law Centre features a stylized mountain range composed of several overlapping triangles in shades of blue and teal. The text "children's law centre" is written in a lowercase, sans-serif font across the middle of the mountain range.

**children's law centre**