

Children's Law Centre

ANNUAL REPORT

2022-23



childrenslawcentre.org.uk

children's law centre



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
Admin, Finance and Operations	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

It brings me great pleasure to introduce the latest Children's Law Centre Annual Report for the year 2022-23. In this report you will find an overview of the large amount of work undertaken by the Centre, its staff and its youth panel to ensure children's rights are respected, realised and vindicated through participation, partnership and representation.

The Children's Law Centre celebrated its 25th anniversary during the period 2022-23. This aligned to welcome funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation which enabled the Centre to comprehensively review and further improve the organisation and governance in preparation for the next 25 years.

Trustees and the senior management team worked hard to ensure the opportunity to improve the organisation and governance of the Centre was maximised. This work has been assisted by Brenda Kelly, working with the senior management team. I would like to thank them, along with the Trustees and the senior management team for the work and effort they have put in over the past year.

Other work included the commencement of the development of a new case management database that will support the management of information and monitoring of advice and case outcomes. Planning also began for the return of training services to CLC which had ended as a result of the pandemic.

As part of the governance review, the Centre updated its articles of association, continued



to support Trustees through training opportunities and recruited a new Trustee to the Board in December 2022.

During a very busy year, the work of the Centre has been nothing short of exceptional, rising to meet the growing challenges faced by children and young people, within an increasingly challenging context.

While this report provides an overview of that work, it can only provide a snapshot. I would like to thank the full staff team for their commitment and dedication to their respective roles during the period. Children and young people in Northern Ireland would be much worse off without the work they do.

Alicia Toal
Chairperson

“During a very busy year, the work of the Centre has been nothing short of exceptional, rising to meet the growing challenges faced by children and young people, within an increasingly challenging context”

Director's Report



The environment in which the Children's Law Centre operated in 2022-23 has been particularly challenging. As we emerged from Covid, the Centre continued to deal with multiple issues of denial of children's rights as a result of actions taken by duty holders in response to the pandemic. The situation was further aggravated by the ongoing impact of Brexit, the socio-economic crisis resulting in cuts to children's services and the absence of a devolved administration in this jurisdiction.

The NI Assembly was dissolved in February 2022 and as the year progressed the dissolution would begin to have serious adverse impacts on decision making, access to services and funding. This was exacerbated by the war in Ukraine and the autumn budget which resulted in interest rises, energy rises and a cost of living crisis.

Against this backdrop CLC has experienced

"The political vacuum curtailed CLC's ability to effect policy and legislative changes to address the worrying and systemic diminution in the delivery of children's rights"

an increase in demand for our services and the complexity of the case work presenting is unprecedented. In the absence of a willingness or inability on the part of duty bearers to resolve cases, we increasingly were required to issue proceedings to secure effective remedies for our clients.

Unsurprisingly given the scale of need, visitors to the REE Rights Responder chatbot more than doubled from the previous year with 41,171 sessions by 35,520 users getting direct access to legal information. Demand for advice also continued to rise. CHALKY, CLC's freephone advice line dealt with 2,742 issues, with many, given the growing complexity of queries, requiring more detailed advice and/or representation. While the number of new judicial reviews had decreased from the 'Covid high' number in the previous two years, they are still much higher than the pre-Covid norm. We issued proceedings in nine new judicial reviews and continued to work on eleven that had commenced during 2021-22. This significant number again reflects the complexity of the issues we are dealing with.

With a new Policy and Public Affairs Manager in place, drawing on our case work, we have been working to improve legislation, policy and practice for the benefit of all children in the jurisdiction. This included working in partnership with the Committee on the Administration of Justice, Amnesty International and Include Youth on the use of spit and bite hoods on children and strip searching of children and young people. In response to this work, the Independent Human Rights Advisor to the NI Policing Board undertook a Human Rights Review of the Strip Searching of Children and Young People in custody with recommendations published in June 2023. The Policing Board have also committed to undertake a human rights review of the policing of children and young people.

As part of the UK examination by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, we

worked in partnership with youth@clc, our youth panel who advise and inform on issues impacting on children and young people. With the financial support of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, we were able to bring young people from youth@clc, Include Youth and VOYPIC to Geneva to give evidence to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in February 2023 as part of the pre-sessional hearings in advance of the UK government examination which was scheduled for May 2023. The outcome from this work and in particular the Committee's Concluding Observations, will help shape CLC's work in the future.

We worked with South Tyrone Empowerment Project (STEP) on two submissions to the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities which informed our ongoing engagement with duty bearers, human rights institutions and politicians on asylum seeker children in contingency accommodation. As the year progressed we started to receive direct contacts from families living in contingency accommodation in relation to living conditions and their impacts on children who have a range of disabilities and learning needs, as well as being trauma experienced.

Our advice and legal teams are now providing legal advice and assistance to a growing number of children in contingency accommodation and we continue to raise the issue with duty holders.

After protracted negotiations in two cases, the Education Authority agreed to High Court declarations that it had breached the children's right to education under Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) for reasons related to a child's disability under Article 14 ECHR,

non-discrimination. In one of these cases they also agreed to declarations that the right to provision under a statement of SEN under Article 16 of the Education (NI) Order 1996 had been denied and that the right to education "other than at school", under Article 86 of the Education (NI) Order 1996, had been breached when a child was unable to attend school because of illness.

In preparation for the NI Assembly elections in May 2022 we developed our 'Close the Gap' publication to highlight our key priorities to improve the lives of children in NI. Despite the ongoing suspension of the Assembly we hosted a number of meetings with MLAs across the political spectrum and were encouraged by the positive response.

The political vacuum curtailed CLC's ability to effect policy and legislative changes to address the worrying and systemic diminution in the delivery of children's rights. This is a perfect storm - duty bearers are increasingly failing to deliver children's rights at a time when the opportunities to effect systemic change is limited. In these circumstances strategic litigation is an important tool to effect individual and societal access to children's rights.

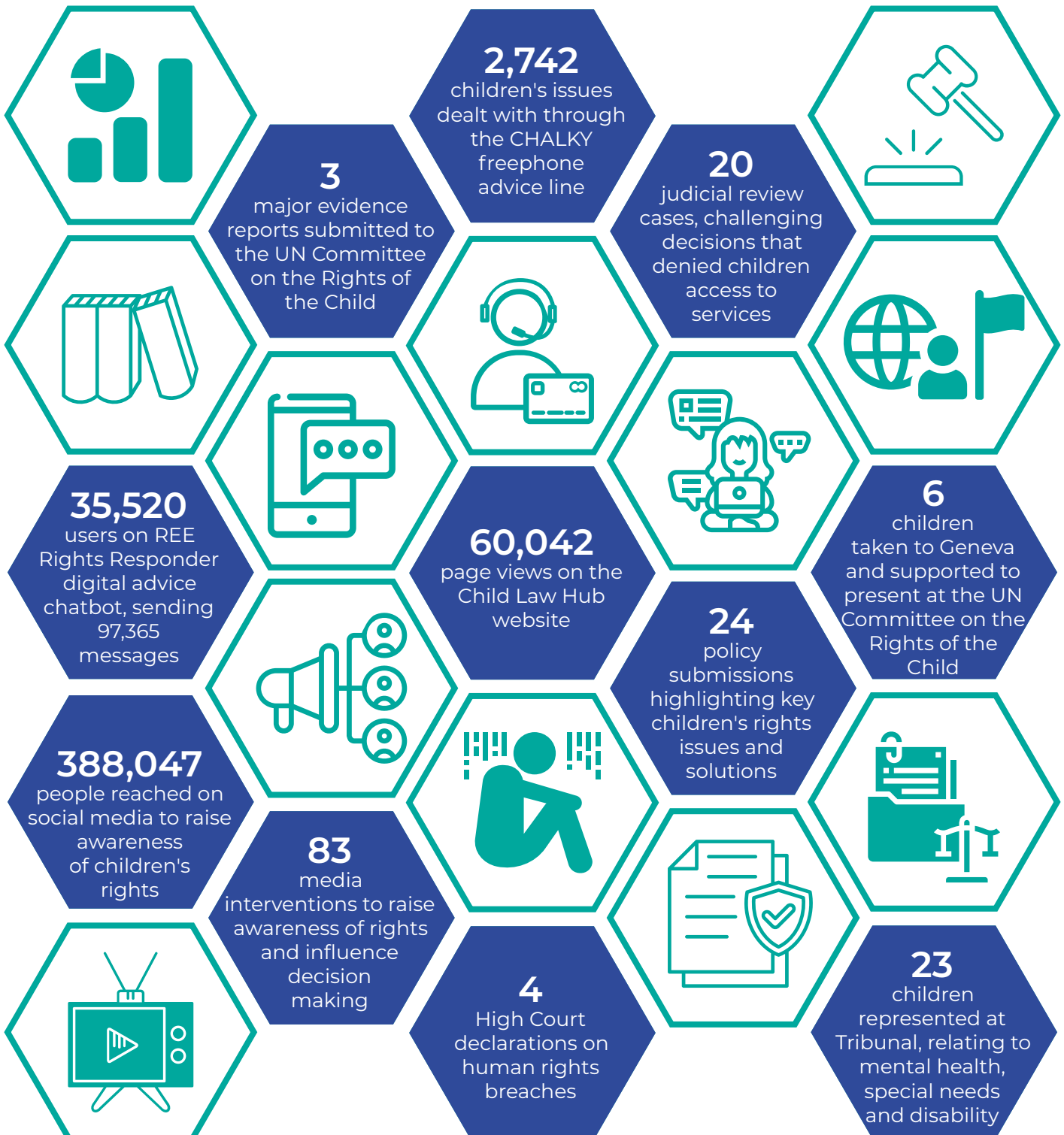
With no restoration of the NI Assembly during the year and the huge and growing impact of the economic crisis on the restoration of pre-Covid service, CLC will continue to utilise strategic litigation and other alternative strategies to challenge the diminution of children's rights in Northern Ireland.











Paddy Kelly
Director

“...the Education Authority agreed to High Court Declarations that it had breached the children's rights to education”

Year in Numbers



Impact at a Glance

 <h3>Successful Education JRs</h3> <p>Secured High Court declarations in two judicial review cases, protecting the right to education for disabled children.</p>	 <h3>Secured Strip Search Review</h3> <p>Uncovered PSNI statistics on the use of strip searches on children and secured a full review by the Policing Board resulting in key changes.</p>
 <h3>Influenced UK Examination</h3> <p>Produced three major reports, working with over 50 NGOs and over 1,000 children and young people. Presented findings in Geneva.</p>	 <h3>Highlighted Forgotten Voices</h3> <p>Co-hosted an election hustings on behalf of children with complex needs. Highlighted systemic failures around respite care services.</p>
 <h3>Fought to Raise the Age</h3> <p>Shaped responses to a consultation on raising the age of criminal responsibility. Published joint brief on evidence and best practice.</p>	 <h3>Equality Complaint Success</h3> <p>Supported a young person in the first ever complaint to the Equality Commission by a person under 18. The complaint was successful.</p>
 <h3>Influenced Restraint Report</h3> <p>Helped secure a Department of Education report reviewing the use of restrictive practices in education settings, with six recommendations.</p>	 <h3>Increased Influence</h3> <p>With the addition of new policy support, CLC influenced decision makers on a range of children's rights issues.</p>

We Increased Our Impact

In the period 2022-23, the Centre once again increased its impact, influence, reach and visibility compared to the previous year.

<p>+255 issues through the advice team compared to 2021/22</p>	<p>+20,828 additional users on REE Rights Responder chatbot</p>		<p>+22 media interventions, raising awareness of child rights breaches</p>	<p>+1,737 additional visitors to the Child Law Hub website</p>
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Advice and Information



The advice team at CLC saw a dramatic increase in the level of demand through the CHALKY freephone advice line and the REE Rights Responder chatbot.

An additional 255 issues were dealt with compared to the previous year, increasing the demand back to pre-covid levels.

Education, disability and discrimination queries accounted for 64% of all issues raised, with the main areas of concern within that category relating to assessments, statements, placements and school transport.

The digital advice chatbot, REE Rights Responder, saw traffic more than double in the year, with the addition of new digital signposting features on the Child Law Hub website and the commencement of co-design work with children and young people to develop a new education strand on REE.

Our CHALKY Advice Team Made A Difference

Last year CHALKY, our freephone advice line, dealt with 2,742 children's rights issues. This included queries relating to:



1,756

Education, disability and discrimination



460

Family Law



72

Human Rights and Justice



160

Care



84

Mental Health



210

General Issues

"I couldn't recommend the Children's Law Centre more, we had an urgent and very difficult situation with our child... the support and advice provided to us helped us to navigate what has been an extremely worrying time."

- Parent of a child assisted by the CHALKY advice team

REE Rights Responder

In the year 2022-23, REE Rights Responder provided legal information and advice to children and young people online, reaching them where they live their lives:



35,520

Users



41,171

Sessions



97,365

Messages



122

Live Chats

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

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

REE
Rights
Responder



Advice in Action

Support for a Child Bullied at School

The CHALKY advice team was contacted by the parents of a secondary school child who was bullied at school for a number of years. The child had become very anxious and was attending CAMHS.

The parents had been trying to find the child an alternative school but without success. The team at CLC gave advice around the statutory assessment process and assisted in an appeal.

Outcome

After appeal, the child was **placed in a new school** through the statutory assessment process. The child was **granted a statement**, with the **additional support** of a classroom assistant and new supportive teachers.

As a result of the changes, the child's **anxiety reduced**, they **settled** into normal school life and were described as a **changed child**.

The parents said: "We were lost at what to do but you helped us get to where we are today."

Specificity of Statement for a Child Starting Nursery

The advice team was contacted by the parent of a child with ASD, cognitive and learning needs, speech and language difficulties and development delay.

Initial advice was given on the general statementing process. However, the proposed statement lacked specificity and the child was struggling to adjust. The CHALKY team offered follow up advice to ensure the statement was specific, quantified and relevant to the child's learning needs.

Outcome

The child's final **statement was updated** following advice from CLC.

The child will **attend mainstream primary school** and was granted one-to-one **classroom assistance** until a special school place becomes available.

"We were lost at what to do but you helped us get to where we are today."

- Parent of child who was helped by the CHALKY advice team

"Thank you so much for all your help, I honestly couldn't have done this without your advice and encouragement. I'm truly grateful to you."

- Parent of child who was helped by the CHALKY advice team

Young People at the Heart of Service Design

Throughout CLC's digital transformation journey, co-design principles have been at the heart of service development. Our digital services have been designed by children and young people, for children and young people. This means they're designed to suit the needs of young people, through the design of content, availability and accessibility.

Funded by The National Lottery Digital Fund, the Centre's youth panel, Youth@CLC, designed and delivered a digital advice chatbot, REE Rights Responder. REE Rights Responder initially provided seven advice strands, alongside REE Live Chat for further bespoke advice as required. Each strand was developed through a co-design process.

In the period 2022-23, the process for a new advice strand began. In August 2022, a workshop was held with children and young people from Youth@CLC, the NI Youth Assembly and the Secondary Students' Union of NI (SSUN). This began the co-design process, putting young people at the heart of our service delivery.

Extensive work was undertaken to develop questions and answers for the new strand in relation to mainstream education queries. The next phase of the work has now begun, with workshops being organised to speak to a range of children with additional needs, assess their barriers to education and develop additional questions and answers that meet their needs.

Look out for the new education strand in 2024. We would like to thank Allen and Overy and PWC for their pro-bono support, as well as all the young people involved throughout the process.



Co-Design Process for Delivery

1. Issue **identified by children and young people** and through assessment of young people's needs.
2. Workshops with groups of young people with **lived experience** and issues identified.
3. Questions **developed by children and young people**.
4. Answers written and checked by **legal professionals**.
5. Workshops by children and young people to ensure answers are **child friendly and easy to understand**.
6. Tech support to update REE Rights Responder.
7. Beta testing by children and young people to **ensure service design meets needs**.
8. Launch of new digital advice strand.



Legal



The legal team at CLC continued to work on a complex and difficult case load.

Main issues included respite care services, delayed discharge of children from hospital, disability discrimination in education and asylum seeking children being placed in contingency accommodation without suitable access to health and education services.



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 Services

JRs against the failure to provide temporary respite care services for severely disabled children.



Disability Discrimination

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



Delayed Discharge

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



Article 21 Homelessness

Assisting young people who are refused emergency accommodation under Article 21 of the Children NI Order



Contingency Hotels

Began legal action to support a disabled asylum seeking child in contingency hotel accommodation

Education

In two landmark cases, the High Court in Belfast declared that the human rights of disabled children were breached when they were refused access to school transport, which denied them access to education.

The cases were brought before the court through applications seeking leave for judicial review. After the Education Authority (EA) provided solutions for each child, legal declarations were secured through agreement that the children in both cases had been deprived of their right to education under Article 2 of Protocol 1, along with Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Centre brought the cases on behalf of two children after a referral for specialist legal services by the charity Angel Eyes as part of a joint EqualEyes project with CLC. The project was set up to protect the equality rights of children with visual impairment.

The CLC legal team argued that prolonged and disproportionate Covid restrictions on school transport for reasons related to disability were unjustifiable and unlawful, interfering with the right to education.

One child was unable to attend specialist

Education Authority Breached Human Rights of Disabled Children During Covid



education placements in person for all but one day of nursery and for the entirety of the P1 and P2 academic years. The best interests of the children and their legal entitlements were entirely discounted within the decision making processes of the EA.

After protracted negotiations to seek and develop alternative educational and transport arrangements for the children, the CLC legal team secured landmark declarations where the EA acknowledged that the children's human rights to education had been breached during the relevant time periods and they were treated differently to other children because of their disabilities.

An Immediate Impact

Since securing access to education, the impact on the children was clear to see.

One of the children initially received sessions of home education and immediately began to show signs of improvement. She began sleeping better, had more energy and became much happier in herself. She is now fully enjoying social and sensory stimulation, loves going to school and is learning to communicate.

The family have more ability to recharge their batteries and to carry out their intense caring role while also looking after their

younger child. The child now goes to school three days, has home tuition two days a week and is gradually moving towards full time school based education.

A parent commented: "My child was denied access purely on the basis of their disability, with no serious effort to risk assess the situation or consider the best interests of my child.

"I'm pleased with the declaration, I only wish it wasn't yet another case where a disabled child has to go to the courts to get access to services. I hope the Education Authority learns from this and properly considers the impact policies have on disabled children."

Mental Health

The Centre's mental health team continued to focus on cases to support children and their families as a result of systemic issues around the failure to provide respite care services and the delayed discharge of children with complex needs from specialist hospital care.

The team continued to represent children at the Mental Health Review Tribunal. In addition, the Centre began receiving contact from asylum seeking children living in contingency hotel accommodation but who were being denied access to statutory health and education services.

In September 2022 the Centre responded to the sudden closure of the Iveagh Unit and the subsequent immediate discharge of patients with complex needs.

The Centre intervened in a case regarding a young person who was refused emergency accommodation by the Trust under Article 21 of the Children NI Order and continued to be detained in the juvenile justice centre



as they were unable to reach conditions for release on bail. The matter was resolved, with two Trusts collaborating to provide suitable accommodation and access to support services. CLC continued to support young people in a number of Article 21 cases throughout the year.

Impact In Focus: Delayed Discharge

CLC continued to represent in a number of complex judicial review cases relating to children who had very significant delays in their hospital discharge planning, pending resolution of plans to secure longterm suitable accommodation and community based family support provision by the Trusts.

During the period 2022-23 the courts found in favour of one of the applications and the following declaratory relief was ordered:

- The Respondent Trust owed a duty to the Applicant under Article 27 of the Children (NI) Order 1995 as a looked after child which the Respondent did not discharge.
- The Respondent's inability to provide appropriate accommodation was a breach of Article 27.
- That the home did not provide independent living for the Applicant's father, as his full-time carer.
- Respite care could not be provided to the Applicant in the family home.
- The Respondent's duty to the Applicant requires it to continue to work with the Applicant's parents to ensure needs are met, including continued provision of direct payments and funding to enable the Applicant to attend a day centre.
- In the event that the Applicant moved to a different area, the Respondent would work with other Trusts to ensure a safe transition of care and responsibility.

Event: Forgotten Voices

In April 2022 the Children's Law Centre and the National Autistic Society NI warned that disabled children are being discriminated against because of the lack of adequate service provision to meet their needs.

The charities, who advocate for people with complex and high support needs, witnessed a sharp increase in the number of people, particularly children, who lost access to vital services in the past number of years. However, both charities insisted the systemic failings were apparent for a long time and only worsened by the response to the pandemic.

While others in society returned to everyday life, many disabled children and adults had been ignored and left isolated, living restricted lives and having their freedoms and autonomy severely curtailed.

To give a voice to the children with complex needs, the two charities organised a special election hustings debate titled 'Forgotten Voices' where they called for urgent and meaningful action to address the failings.



Impact in Focus: Respite Services

During the period 2022-23, the Centre's legal team continued to provide representation in a number of cases relating to failures to provide respite care.

A judgment was secured in October 2022 when the court held that the Applicant was a 'looked after child' who was assessed to require respite provision.

The Respondent Trust was mandated to provide accommodation but failed to do so.

The Trust gave an undertaking to the Court to provide further information to the Applicant and CLC regarding a business case, including its presentation to the Department of Health and the steps to be taken to make future respite provision

available within the Trust area.

The following declaratory relief was given by the High Court:

- The Court declared that the Respondent Trust, having failed to provide the Applicant with assessed need for respite provision for an unreasonable period of time, was in breach of its duty to the Applicant under Article 15 of the Health and Social Care (NI) Order 1972.
- The Court further directed that the current proceedings be converted to the King's Bench of the High Court for an assessment of damages arising from the Trust's failure to make available respite provision to the Applicant.

Policy

Policy Expertise on the World Stage

With the addition of the new Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Fergal McFerran, the Centre's policy work grew in the period 2022-23.

The collapse of the NI Assembly created significant challenges in influencing decision makers. However, the Centre's expertise was called upon to input into significant reviews of children's rights.

April 2022

CLC and STEP submitted two joint papers to the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

The papers highlighted rights breaches in relation to traveller children and asylum seeker children living in contingency accommodation in Northern Ireland.

Outcomes

- Uncovered conditions facing children in contingency hotels.
- Raised public awareness of rights breaches for asylum seeker children.
- Started extensive policy research work into the impact of the use of contingency hotels by the Home Office.

June 2022

CLC briefed the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović on children's rights issues in

Northern Ireland, supported the setting up of an NGO meeting and attended a children's meeting.

Outcomes

- Report published in December 2022.
- Commissioner Mijatović warned against a regression on human rights.
- Extensive recommendations made concerning children's rights in NI.

October 2022

CLC worked in collaboration with Children's Rights Alliance for England, Together Scotland and the Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group to produce a series of eight thematic briefings to inform the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Outcome

- Influenced a UK wide review to ensure children's rights in NI were included.

December 2022

Three major reports were submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, representing the expertise of over 50 organisations and leading experts, as well as over 1,000 children and young people in Northern Ireland.

Outcomes

- Influenced the UN Committee's examination of the UK.
- CLC invited to present evidence to the Committee in Geneva in February 2022.

"Thank you again for your help... the meeting with the youth advisory panel and other young people from NI was really one of the highlights of the visit for the Commissioner."

- Office of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Policy Submissions

- **Special Education Strategic Area Plan 2022-27** - April 2022
- **Traveller Children and Families (Joint Submission)** - April 2022
- **Asylum Seeker Children in Contingency Accommodation (Joint Submission)** - April 2022
- **Close the Gap: CLC Priorities for the New Assembly** - June 2022
- **Bail, Remand and Custodial Arrangements for Children** - Aug 2022
- **EA Equality Action Plan** - Aug 2022
- **Rights Removal Bill (Joint Briefing)** - Sept 2022
- **UK Government Bill of Rights Implications for Children** - Sept 2022
- **Policing and Justice (Joint UPR Briefing)** - Oct 2022
- **Non Discrimination and Participation (Joint UPR Briefing)** - Oct 2022
- **Mental Health (Joint UPR Briefing)** - Oct 2022
- **Immigration (Joint UPR Briefing)** - Oct 2022
- **General Measures (Joint UPR Briefing)** - Oct 2022
- **Education (Joint UPR Briefing)** - Oct 2022
- **Child Poverty (Joint UPR Briefing)** - Oct 2022
- **Access to Justice (Joint UPR Briefing)** - Oct 2022
- **10 Reasons Why Ten is Too Young (Joint Briefing)** - Nov 2022
- **Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility** - Dec 2022
- **Northern Ireland NGO Stakeholder Report 2 Evidence** - Dec 2022
- **Northern Ireland NGO Stakeholder Report 2** - Dec 2022
- **Rights Here Right Now - Northern Ireland Children and Young People Report** - Dec 2022
- **NI NGO Written Statement to UN Committee on the Rights of the Child** - Jan 2023
- **NI Policing Board Corporate Plan 2023-25** - Jan 2023
- **APG on Mental Health Inquiry into Mental Health Education and Early Intervention in Schools** - Feb 2023

Policing Under the Spotlight



In March 2023, the Children's Law Centre secured an investigation and review of PSNI strip searches on children.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board's Human Rights Adviser committed to the review directly following work by the Centre to raise concerns around the practice.

In announcing the terms of reference, the Policing Board highlighted two key concerns, including the evidential basis for conducting strip searches and the lack of an appropriate adult being present in most cases. Both concerns were initially uncovered by the Centre's policy team.

In January 2023, the Children's Law Centre uncovered a number of concerning statistics highlighting the absence of items found in most cases of a strip search and concern around the threshold being used to justify strip searches, the overwhelming majority of which took place without an appropriate adult present.

Following the announcement of the Terms of Reference for the investigation and review, the Centre's Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Fergal McFerran, said:

"The Children's Law Centre welcomes this investigation. We have consistently raised our concerns around the strip searching of children and young people by the PSNI. We are pleased that Policing Board members and the Human Rights Adviser have taken our concerns seriously.

"We believe the commissioning of this investigation is itself a sign that serious concerns in relation to the practice of strip searching children remain unanswered. We hope the investigation will bring the appropriate levels of scrutiny and we have no doubt there will be serious failings identified. It is right that the actions of the PSNI on this issue are carefully examined.

"From the information we have been able to uncover, we know that in almost all cases, nothing is found as a result of a strip search. It is our view that this demonstrates the lack of justification for using such an invasive use of force on children, some of whom have been as young as 14."

The success in securing the review of strip searches formed part of the growing impact the Centre had on the scrutiny of the PSNI's practices concerning children and young people.

The Centre continued its work to prevent the use of spit and bite guards, particularly on children and young people. This work was carried out alongside Amnesty International, Include Youth and Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ).

The Centre continued to raise concerns around other uses of force, including stop and search and the use of plastic bullets.



Key Issues in Focus



Stakeholder Report 2

In September 2022, CLC put out a call for evidence to NGOs in Northern Ireland to inform a report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child - 'Stakeholder Report 2'.

The resulting report, edited by Dr Deena Haydon, was an extensive and authoritative overview of children's rights breaches in Northern Ireland, covering a wide range of issues.

The report was submitted in December 2022, along with an additional evidence report. It was endorsed by over 50 organisations and experts and resulted in an invite to present to the Committee in Geneva in February 2023 on behalf of the NGO sector.

The report was also covered extensively in local media, raising awareness of the lack of participation in decision making and the UNCRC reporting process.

Outcomes

- Endorsed by over 50 organisations and experts, CLC was regarded as the leading voice for the NGO sector in Northern

- Ireland on children's rights issues.
- An invitation was received to present evidence to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- Raised public awareness of children's rights breaches.

Presented Evidence to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva

As a result of submitting the Stakeholder Report 2 evidence, the Centre was invited to present oral evidence to the Committee at a stakeholders meeting in Geneva.

Outcomes

- Shaped questions on key children's rights issues ahead of an oral examination and questioning of key UK government and NI Executive officials.
- Ensured the particular circumstances of children in Northern Ireland were given due attention.
- Built relationships with international child rights experts.

Challenged Age Discrimination Through a Successful Equality Complaint

In March 2023, an Equality Commission investigation into the High Street Voucher Scheme found that the Department for the Economy failed to comply with its own Equality Scheme. The investigation found that the Department failed to screen at



Damning Reports Show How Regression in Rights is Harming Children



the earliest opportunity and that it failed to properly assess the impacts of the policy on children under 18.

This followed work by the Centre to support the first ever complaint to the Equality Commission by a person under 18.

Outcome

- Highlighted the need for decision makers in Northern Ireland to fully comply with equality duties.

Exposed the Conditions Faced by Asylum Seeking Children in Contingency Hotels

In April 2022, CLC and STEP submitted a joint report to the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The report highlighted the conditions and rights breaches facing asylum seeking children placed in contingency hotel accommodation in Northern Ireland.

The report was also endorsed by four other organisations – Conway Education Centre, Participation and Practice of Rights (PPR), Barnardo's Northern Ireland and South Belfast Sure Start.

Outcomes

- The report marked the first detailed account of the issues facing children in contingency hotel accommodation in Northern Ireland.

- The report was covered by local media, raising awareness of the conditions.
- The Centre developed a more substantive piece of work on the issue, in partnership with STEP.
- The CLC advice team began receiving contact for assistance from asylum seeking families who were becoming more aware of their rights.

Restrictive Practices

In the previous year, the Centre's Special Educational Needs and Disability Expert worked on a Department of Education reference group and an NI Commissioner for Children and Young People's advisory group on the issue of restraint and seclusion in schools.

In April 2022, the Department of Education then presented a report reviewing the use of restrictive practices in education settings.

The report made six recommendations, including repeal of Article 4 (1)(c) of the Education (NI) Order 1998. It also outlined the need for statutory guidance and recognised children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Outcomes

- Publication of a report with six recommendations.
- Inclusion of key priorities raised by the Centre during a review and evidence collecting period.
- Increased public awareness on the issue,



following media scrutiny of the work carried out by CLC.

Close the Gap

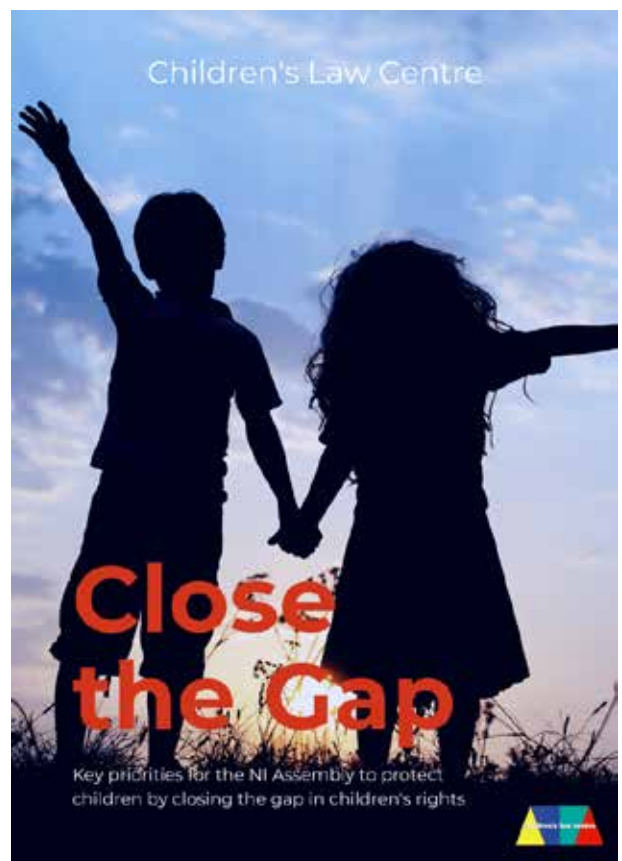
In May 2022, following the Northern Ireland Assembly elections, the Centre launched a new document outlining some key priorities for the new Assembly to protect children and young people.

The document, titled 'Close the Gap', highlighted the positive actions that can be taken by politicians to close the gap in children's rights, placing an emphasis on the need for a functioning government.

The publication of the document was followed by extensive engagement with local decision makers across Northern Ireland's political parties.

Outcomes

- Key children's rights issues highlighted to decision makers.
- Built relationships across political parties in advance of a future return to a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly.



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: 'Stop Criminalising Our Children'

In November 2022, the Children's Law Centre, alongside Queen's University Belfast, Centre for Children's Rights, Include Youth, NIACRO and Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) jointly called on support for raising the age of criminal responsibility in Northern Ireland to 16, with no exceptions.

The call came at an expert led event titled 'Stop Criminalising Our Children', where attendees heard from a range of experts, including children themselves.

The event was organised in response to the Department of Justice NI's consultation on whether the age of criminal responsibility should be raised in Northern Ireland. It was attended by a wide range of organisations and individuals, across the children's and human rights fields, academics, the police, arms length bodies and the legal profession.

Alongside the event, a briefing note was launched to guide potential respondents to the consultation with evidence and best practice on youth justice issues.



Outcome

The consultation received over 450 responses. The Department of Justice NI published a summary report of the responses received which showed an overwhelming support for raising the age of criminal responsibility. Organisations indicated that the event and briefing shaped their responses positively.

Youth Participation and Advocacy



The year 2022-23 was an extremely busy one for Youth@CLC. Following the work to collect the views of over 1,000 children and young people, they submitted an evidence report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, titled 'Rights Here, Right Now'. The report was edited by Dr Deena Haydon.

The report was well received and remarked upon by members of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. A delegation of youth panel members were then invited to attend the Committee in Geneva in February 2023.

A significant piece of capacity building work was undertaken by the Centre's Policy Officer Claire Kemp to prepare a delegation of children and young people from a range of organisations and backgrounds ahead of the children's evidence session in Geneva. This involved sessions on knowledge of rights and the UNCRC, planning sessions and engagement meetings.

Alongside submitting the report, Youth@CLC also launched a summary of the 'Rights Here, Right Now' report for children and young people. The report was circulated to children and young people through the network of schools, youth clubs and youth organisations.

In January 2023 there was also a significant recruitment drive to refresh the youth panel. This resulted in a number of new members, ready to lead the way on the issues raised in the 'Rights Here, Right Now' report.

Children's Voices Being Heard

As a result of the 'Rights Here, Right Now' report, Youth@CLC members were invited to give evidence in a children's session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva.

The Centre led a delegation of children and young people from Northern Ireland to take part in the children's session.

The meeting was a success and members of the Committee would remark on the valuable evidence presented.

Following the Geneva trip, when asked if they felt heard at the session, all the young people who responded to a CLC survey felt they had been listened to and now felt confident advocating for their rights.



Communications



Communications in the Centre continued to grow, with an increase in the number of media interventions and an increase in website visits an indication of a growing presence in the sector.

Working alongside the legal and advice teams, the policy team and the youth panel, the communications team worked

to highlight key issues relating to children's rights in Northern Ireland.

As a result, the Centre positioned itself as a leading voice on issues like:

- Police uses of force on children, including strip searches and the use of spit and bite guards.
- The conditions facing asylum seeking children in contingency accommodation.
- Rights breaches in the education sector, including the failure to provide adequate relationship and sexuality education, and the unlawful use of restraint and seclusion in schools.
- The views of children in Northern Ireland.



Growing Impact

In 2022-23, CLC reached more people than ever before



83

media interventions



60,042

website page views



34,930

users on the website



388,047

people reached on social media



+25%

increase in social media followers

Admin, Finance and Operations

As the Centre emerged from the previous years marked by the global pandemic, we felt the growing impact of the cost of living crisis, coupled with a more challenging funding environment. As a result, the Centre undertook significant work to ensure the future sustainability of the organisation.

This work included:

- Development of a new case management database to support the management of sensitive case information, advice and case outcomes.
- Planning for the return of training services to the centre, including securing additional funding.
- Continued work on a governance review, including updated articles of association, support for Trustees through training, and the recruitment of a new Trustee in December 2022.
- Reviewing and updating internal documents.
- A salary benchmarking exercise.
- Wellbeing events for staff.
- Completion of a three year accreditation for the Lexcel quality standard.



Celebrating 25 Years of CLC

The Centre celebrated its 25th anniversary in September 2022. This aligned to welcome funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation which has enabled us to comprehensively review and further improve the organisation and our governance in preparation for the next 25 years.

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation funding was timely in allowing the Centre to develop and grow at a time of increasing need for children and young people. It also allowed for significant work to be carried out to support future sustainability of the Centre.



Accounts Overview

Draft Financial Statements at 08 November 2023 at 12:54:35
CHILDREN'S LAW CENTRE (NORTHERN IRELAND)

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES
 INCLUDING INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
 FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

	Unrestricted funds 2023 £	Restricted funds 2023 £	Total 2023 £	Unrestricted funds 2022 £	Restricted funds 2022 £	Total 2022 £
<u>Income and endowments from:</u>						
Donations and legacies	50	-	50	384	-	384
Charitable activities	71,715	680,149	751,864	54,154	853,081	907,235
Investments	38,404	-	38,404	36,178	-	36,178
Movement in pension provision	613	-	613	829	-	829
Total income	110,782	680,149	790,931	91,545	853,081	944,626
<u>Expenditure on:</u>						
Charitable activities	50,327	841,043	891,370	43,016	755,210	798,226
Gross transfers between funds	-	-	-	(9,381)	9,381	-
Net income/(expenditure) for the year/						
Net movement in funds	60,455	(160,894)	(100,439)	39,148	107,252	146,400
Fund balances at 1 April 2022	316,617	633,333	949,950	277,469	526,081	803,550
Fund balances at 31 March 2023	377,072	472,439	849,511	316,617	633,333	949,950

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

The statement of financial activities also complies with the requirements for an income and expenditure account under the Companies Act 2006.

A full copy of the accounts can be made available on request

Accounts Overview (continued)

	2023		2022	
	£	£	£	£
Fixed assets				
Intangible assets		7,770		31,848
Tangible assets		241,194		249,596
Investment properties		214,000		214,000
		<u>462,964</u>		<u>495,444</u>
Current assets				
Debtors	52,500		145,298	
Cash at bank and in hand	553,265		553,881	
		<u>605,765</u>		<u>699,179</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year				
		<u>(57,650)</u>		<u>(63,429)</u>
Net current assets		<u>548,115</u>		<u>635,750</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u>1,011,079</u>		<u>1,131,194</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year				
		(141,814)		(156,352)
Provisions for liabilities				
Defined benefit pension liability	19,754		24,892	
		<u>(19,754)</u>		<u>(24,892)</u>
Net assets		<u><u>849,511</u></u>		<u><u>949,950</u></u>

	2023		2022	
	£	£	£	£
Income funds				
Restricted funds		472,439		633,333
<u>Unrestricted funds</u>				
Designated funds	55,000		10,165	
General unrestricted funds	341,826		331,344	
Pension reserve	(19,754)		(24,892)	
		<u>377,072</u>		<u>316,617</u>
		<u><u>849,511</u></u>		<u><u>949,950</u></u>

Thanks



The Children's Law Centre would like to say thank you to everyone who helped us throughout an exceptionally busy year. Without the help of a wide range of individuals, organisations and funders, we would not have been able to carry out the work to change children's lives.

The growing staff team continued to apply their expertise, hard work and commitment in a way that has had a huge impact on children and young people. From frontline advice and representation through to advocating on behalf of children and young people, the impact of the Centre has continued to increase.

Thanks must also go to our funders who have

made the work possible. Like many others, in the year 2022-23, the Centre has had to deal with a dramatic increase in running costs, while funding opportunities have become more difficult to secure. At the same time, the challenges facing children and young people have continued to grow. Continued support from our funders has allowed us to rise to the challenge while supporting the future sustainability of the Centre.

We would like to particularly thank Youth@CLC for their work to influence the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Assisted in developing a children and young people's report by Dr Deena Haydon, Youth@CLC were able to take authoritative research on the views of children and young people in Northern Ireland to the children's meeting in Geneva. There can be no doubt that their hard work and efforts paid off, assisted with the support of Claire Kemp.

Finally, the Centre saw three staff move on, Barbara Muldoon, Maria McCloskey and Sinead McSorley. We would like to thank them all for their efforts through their time at CLC and wish them all the best in their future careers.

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

- Department of Health
- Department of Health SPPG
- Department of Education
- BBC Children in Need
- Angel Eyes NI
- Esmee Fairbairn
- The National Lotteries Community Fund
- Children's Rights Alliance
- Access to Justice
- Legal Education Foundation
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation

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)
- Fergal McFerran (Policy and Public Affairs Manager)
- Eamonn McNally (Mental Health Solicitor)
- Sinead McSorley (Youth Participation and Advocacy Worker)
- Sam Nelson (Communications and Marketing Manager)
- Helen Rafferty (Head of Administration and Finance)
- Kathryn Stevenson (Head of Legal Services)
- Trevor Wright (Head of Operations)

Youth@CLC

- Angus Bolton
- Maeve Burke
- Lauren Campbell
- Ruby Cambell
- Niamh Craig
- Kezzia Dalton
- Grainne Doherty
- Lauren Duffy
- James Flanagan
- Morgen Henderson
- Sarah Kelly
- Erin Marrs
- Jay Martin
- Rebecca Moore
- Eilidh O'Connor
- Zoe O'Hare
- Fahriye Onur
- Conor Reilly
- Evan Scollan
- Cohen Taylor
- Daniel Walls
- Saorla White

Independent Consultants

- Dr Deena Haydon
- Brenda Kelly
- Deirdre McAliskey

Board of Trustees

- Yvonne Campbell (Resigned 8 December 2022)
- Trása Canavan
- Duane Farrell
- Jerome Finnegan
- Brian Moss (Appointed 8 December 2022)
- Muriel Bailey (Resigned 8 December 2022)
- 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

CHALKY Freephone Advice Line:
0808 808 5678
chalky@childrenslawcentre.org

REE Rights Responder
#Ask REE at 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 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.

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