

Children's Law Centre

CANDIDATE INFORMATION PACK

TRAINEE SOLICITOR

JUSTICE FIRST FELLOWSHIP

APPLICATIONS CLOSE
28TH NOVEMBER 2025



childrenslawcentre.org.uk

children's law centre

Children's Rights Change Children's Lives

With thanks to:

LEF

Dear Candidate

Thank you for your interest in joining the Children's Law Centre (CLC) as a Trainee Solicitor under the Legal Education Foundation's Justice First Fellowship Scheme.

Every year, thousands of children, their parents/carers and families benefit from our direct help to access public services, and many more through our efforts to influence and effect strategic change. We are proud of what we achieve in the interests of children under the aegis of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We continue to grow, building on our excellent track record of influencing decision-makers in the best interests of children who are vulnerable and disadvantaged through disability, special educational needs, poor mental health, homelessness, seeking asylum or who have been denied services to which they are entitled under equality and human rights legislation.

We are delighted to once again be offering this opportunity with support from the Legal Education Foundation. This role offers the opportunity to work with and learn from CLC's experienced legal, advice and policy teams, work directly with children and young people through our Youth@CLC youth panel, engage with legal, health, education and youth justice professionals whilst building on your experience as a social justice advocate.

To be considered for the role you will need to:

- Have passed the Institute of Professional Legal Studies entrance exam and have a place at the Institute of Professional Legal



Studies beginning in September 2026.

- Be able to demonstrate a passion for access to justice, along with the highest level of skills and aptitude and the potential to drive innovation in future legal practice; and
- Be willing and able to commit to serving a 29-month term as a Fellow.

If you are passionate about using the law to deliver social justice, and you are looking for a fantastic opportunity to complete your solicitor practice and move on to the next stage in a career advancing access to justice, then the Justice First Fellowship is for you.

Good luck and we look forward to hearing from you.



John O'Doherty
Chief Executive Officer

"This role offers the opportunity to work with and learn from CLC's experienced legal, advice and policy teams"

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



Who We Are



At Children's Law Centre (CLC) we have always believed that children's rights change children's lives.

Founded on the principles laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), we were established in 1997 to provide legal advice to children and young people. We have since developed into the leading children's rights charity in Northern Ireland, helping thousands of children to vindicate their rights each year, ensuring their access to services and equality of treatment.

For those who need individual legal advice and support, they can contact our freephone advice service for children and young people and speak directly to a legal adviser. CLC provides advice to vulnerable children and families on over 3,000 legal issues each year; expert advocacy support to around 300 of

these children in more complex enquiries; and will also take strategic legal action on behalf of 30 vulnerable children per annum. Many of our clients are referred and/or supported by sister organisations, who together with CLC, have identified systemic breaches of children's rights.

CLC provides support to all children in Northern Ireland including those who are most disadvantaged and marginalised, children with disabilities, special educational needs, mental ill health, those experiencing homelessness, children in contact with the police and justice system and refugee and asylum-seeking children living in temporary accommodation and unable to access services.

CLC leads the voluntary and community sector through the UNCRC reporting process, having submitted the most recent NGO stakeholder report in 2022. The concluding observations from this process included a legally significant recommendation that the NI Secretary of State withdraw the composite 2023-24 budget issued in the absence of the NI Assembly as they believed children and young people in Northern Ireland would be disproportionately impacted by cuts to essential services. CLC then undertook a strategic case against the Department of Finance, grounded by S.75 equality law

"CLC provides support to all children in Northern Ireland including those who are most disadvantaged and marginalised"

under the NI Act 1998, to challenge and future-proof the process for budget setting across all NI government departments. This is a watershed case for the Centre as it was taken in its own name and has the potential to have a wide-ranging impact by ensuring equality impact assessments are conducted on all future budgetary decisions. The case will conclude in Autumn 2025.

We were instrumental in the implementation of key aspects of the UNCRC, such as the introduction of the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People in 2003. We have also been at the heart of key domestic achievements around children's rights, including the introduction of the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) in 2015.

CLC led the way in protecting children rights during COVID-19, securing a vulnerable children action plan to safeguard our most vulnerable children and young people through the pandemic. We have since submitted briefing papers to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry, informed by our advice and casework, to support its work in examining the impact of the pandemic on children's education, early years provision, health, wellbeing and social care.

More recently, CLC has joined forces with

National Autistic Society (NI) to advocate on behalf of children with disabilities who are being denied access to respite care due to repurposing and closure of respite units. BBC NI 'Spotlight' broadcast an award-winning documentary 'I am Not Ok', highlighting the devastating impact that the lack of respite services has had on children in need and their families. During 2024, we successfully lobbied the Health Committee of the NI Assembly and the Health Minister who, in response, arranged for the release of an additional £2M in year to target respite services and agreed a recurrent budget of £13M annually going forward. We continue to work with these families, whilst liaising with the Health Committee and Minister to monitor how the additional resources are being utilised by health trusts to improve children's access to vital support services.

CLC continues to grow as a leading children's rights organisation. Work continues on a broad range of children's rights issues. Our belief that children's rights change children's lives is the force that drives our work forward for future generations.



What We Do

Youth@CLC

CLC's work is guided by Youth@CLC, a peer advocacy panel of young people aged 14-18, who influence the way in which we campaign for children's rights and who are supported to self-advocate on the key issues affecting their lives.

Youth@CLC has represented the interests of children from Northern Ireland at the UN Committee on the Rights of Child, meeting with international decision-makers and ensuring that the voices of children and young people in this jurisdiction are heard. Having contributed to the development of the young people's report, members from the Youth@CLC panel formed part of a delegation of young people from Northern Ireland to present findings from the report to the UN Committee at hearings in Geneva, in February and May 2023.

Youth@CLC assisted the development of CLC's REE Rights Responder chatbot, having their efforts recognised as finalists in the Pearson World Changer Awards in 2020. A new REE Education Rights strand was completed in 2024, with a launch event at Stormont Parliament Building, attended by 80 young people who were involved in developing content. Last year, there were

55,000 contacts with REE. Youth@CLC are now recording a series of podcasts to raise awareness on key children's rights themes, such as child poverty and the right to vote at 16.

Legal Services

We provide a free legal information and advice service and legal representation to children and young people. We work to ensure that public authorities, tribunals and courts recognise children as autonomous rights holders with the right to express their views and have them taken into account in decisions impacting on their lives. We strive to ensure that when decisions are being made:

- The decision is UNCRC and children's rights compliant.
- The voice of the child is always heard.
- The child's best interests are at the heart of decision making.
- All children have equality of access to their legal rights, regardless of their age, background or circumstance.

We run a freephone legal advice line called



CHALKY, delivering advice on 3000 children and young people's legal issues each year. We provide accessible legal information for children and young people through REE Rights Responder and live chat.

We also deliver free legal representation, particularly at SENDIST and children's Mental Health Tribunals, and undertake strategic litigation following the criteria contained within our casework policy.

Policy and Public Affairs

Our policy research and advocacy work informs and influences decision makers. We ensure that government is reminded of its international obligations under the UNCRC when drafting policy and legislation. CLC also leads the NI NGO stakeholder engagement with the UNCRC through the UK reporting process. Through our casework we identify key issues impacting on children and propose evidence-based solutions, underpinned by the children's rights framework. Supported by our team of legal experts, we provide analysis of law, policy and practice through a children's rights lens.

Through our policy and public affairs work CLC engages with the NI Executive and Assembly, the UK and Irish governments, the European Union and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Key themes of CLC's policy advocacy include raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 16 in accordance with UNCRC recommendations; securing

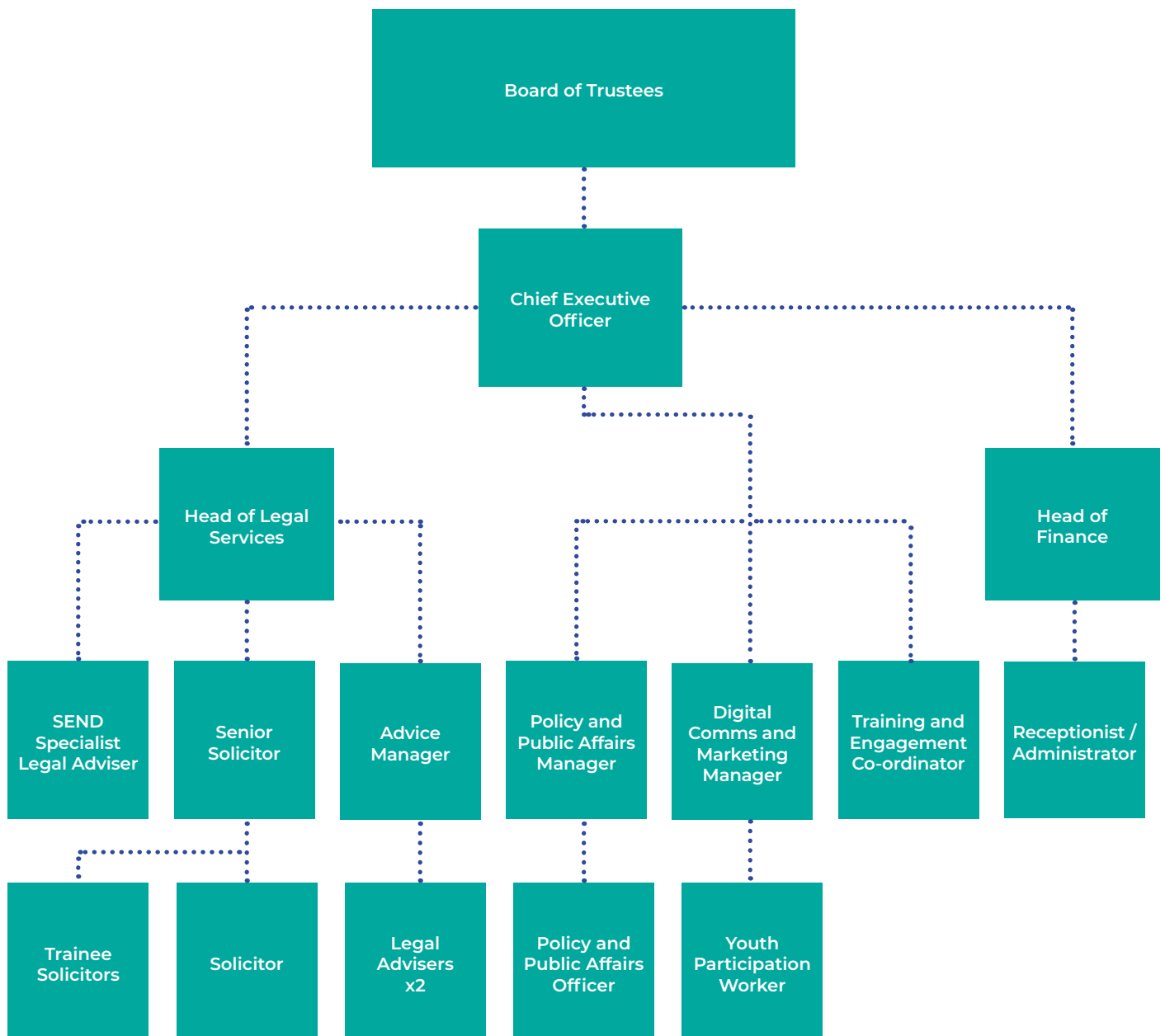
children's rights compliant legal reform within the Justice Bill; repeal of the 'reasonable chastisement' defence to physical punishment of children; tackling the use of restraint and seclusion of children in educational placements; challenging inequalities arising from SEN services reform; delivery of an effective Anti-Poverty Strategy; advocacy for equal access to services for migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children and protection from racial discrimination and hate crimes; implementation of recommendations within the Independent Review of Children's Health and Social Care; and delivery of post-adoption support/leaving after care services within the Adoption and Children Act (NI) 2022.

Training and engagement

Providing children's rights training and awareness is one of the best ways for us to inform children and young people, their parents and carers of their rights and empower them to identify their needs as legal entitlements. CLC's legal and policy teams also provide a range of bespoke programmes to professionals in the children's sector and wider voluntary and community sector, to duty bearers in government and to the legal professions. Topics include mental health and capacity, special education needs legal framework, youth homelessness, child protection case conferences, voice of children in legal proceedings, UNCRC, and training is tailored to suit each audience.



How We Are Organised



Job Description

Job Title:	Trainee Solicitor
Reports to:	Senior Solicitor, Children's Law Centre
Location:	127-131 Ormeau, Road, Belfast, BT7 1SH
Salary:	£24,796 (Point 3, NCJ Scale), plus IPLS Fees for Solicitor Practice Certificate, QUB
Hours:	35 hours per week
Duration:	Fixed term 29 months
Start Date:	April 2026

Objectives of the Role

This role is supported by the Legal Education Foundation's Justice First Fellowship and the successful candidate will be required to complete the LEF Justice First Fellowship Scheme ('the Scheme') and complete the recognised post graduate solicitors training through the Institute of Professional Legal Studies, Queen's University Belfast, in accordance with Law Society of Northern Ireland requirements.

The trainee will be based at the Children's Law Centre (CLC) undertaking legal services work including delivery of CLC's legal advice and information service, provision of legal outreach services, client casework, negotiation and representation at tribunal hearings, involvement in strategic litigation, policy and training from a children's rights perspective.

In addition, the successful candidate must also develop and implement an agreed Fellowship project that will advance access to justice. The successful candidate will be supervised and supported by CLC's Senior Solicitor and will have the opportunity to attend and participate in the wider support, training and opportunities component of the Scheme, as organised by the Legal Education Foundation and its partners.

Appointment to this post is conditional upon the candidate being accepted onto the Solicitor's Practice Course for the period from January – December 2027, at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies, Queen's University Belfast in accordance with the

requirements of the Law Society of Northern Ireland

The trainee will complete a 29-month solicitor traineeship, combining pre and post course periods of in-office training with 12-months full-time study at IPLS, Queen's University, Belfast. Training under the Fellowship will commence in April 2026 and finish at the end of August 2028.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

Advice and Casework

- With appropriate supervision, provide CLC clients with legal advice, information and appropriate representation on the law as it relates to children and young people.
- Carry out legal research as required to assist with legal advice and information enquiries and ongoing casework.
- With appropriate supervision to advise, represent and negotiate on behalf of children and young people and their parents/carers in relation to casework, including providing representation at tribunal.
- Participate in CLC casework meetings and assist the Legal Team in identifying, initiating and conducting strategic litigation at court and tribunals in accordance with the Centre's Casework Policy.
- Assist members of the Legal Team with

the drafting and preparation of legal documents or submissions as required.

- Assist with the preparation of applications for legal aid assistance and the processing of those applications in accordance with the Regulations governing legal aid.
- Maintain accurate records of all advice, information and representation provided in accordance with CLC accredited legal quality standards (Law Society of Northern Ireland, Lexcel) and any funders requirements.
- Participate in the delivery of legal outreach services and awareness raising sessions to promote CLC legal services.
- Assist in the production and revision of the Centre's legal information resources to reflect changes in the law, including updating of legal information on CLC's website.
- Undertake training, supervision and development relevant to the position, including shadowing other members of the Legal Team.
- Work as a member of the Legal Team and contribute to the overall operation, advancement and strategic development of CLC, in accordance with organisational aims and objectives.
- Assist CLC staff and volunteers as required.
- Liaise with other agencies and working contacts (see below) as appropriate.
- Undertake such administrative duties as may be appropriate in the performance of the main duties of the post and to assist the smooth running of the Legal Unit.

Policy and Training Work

- With appropriate supervision, undertake

policy research and analysis, including preparing papers, briefings and publications to inform and support ongoing influencing work.

- Assist CLC's Policy and Legal Teams in preparing responses to consultation documents and policy statements.
- Assist in identifying the training needs of CLC members and others in response to changes in legislation and policy or test cases/case law developments.
- With appropriate support and supervision, to research and produce written training resources and assist in the delivery of training.
- Assist with preparation for and participate in seminars, conferences and events, as required.

Justice First Fellowship Scheme Project

- As a fellow of the Scheme, develop and implement an agreed Fellowship Scheme project that will advance access to justice.
- Report as required on the progress of the project.
- Monitor and measure outcomes of the project by agreed methods to assist CLC in evaluating the impact of the project.

Working Contacts

Staff, volunteers, Board of Trustees and members of the Children's Law Centre, Youth@CLC, children and young people, child and youth groups, voluntary and community sector organisations, relevant statutory and government agencies, political parties, MLAs, MPs, Assembly/parliamentary committees, legislators and policy makers, lawyers, academics and other professionals or special interest groups working with and for children and young people, domestic and international human rights institutions and researchers.

Pre-Employment Vetting

As this post will involve contact with children and young people, the successful applicant will be subject to an enhanced Access NI check. Appointment will only be made on the completion of a satisfactory check.

Children's Law Centre's approach to training a Fellow

In Northern Ireland, the fellow will complete a 29-month solicitor training contract combining pre and post course periods of in-office training with 12 months full-time study at IPLS from January to December 2027. The trainee would be expected to work in the office during vacation periods from the IPLS, less any period of annual leave accrued.

From April to December 2026, pre-course training includes a comprehensive induction with all staff, familiarisation with CLC's legal policy and procedures, child-safeguarding and data protection training and access to our in-house legal training programme. The trainee will receive detailed operational training on advice giving and recording on our digital case management system with ongoing support and supervision.

The trainee will work shadow CLC's legal team developing skills in conducting client interviews and learn to provide Tier 1 & 2 advice and assistance, including at outreach clinics in the Juvenile Justice Centre, mental health units and children's residential facilities, receiving practical training on communicating and working with vulnerable and disadvantaged child clients.

The trainee will attend fortnightly casework meetings where requests for representation are considered and ongoing case strategies are agreed. Experience will be gained from attending High Court judicial review proceedings, formal legal mediation and tribunal hearings with legally qualified staff. The Fellow will also assist the team with strategic casework by preparing case

statements, undertaking legal research, drafting appeal submissions for tribunals and completing legal aid applications. A trainee at CLC would assist with delivery of our in-house child rights focused legal training programme. The trainee will also design and commence their social justice project during this period with support from their line manager and our current Fellow.

Post completion of the IPLS course, the trainee will receive opportunities to develop their knowledge and experience of tribunal procedure and strategic casework. They will be supported to prepare and represent clients, including at SENDIST, school admission and expulsion appeals and mental health tribunals with a focus on inclusive representation for children, promoting the child's right to have their views heard and to participate in proceedings.

Key areas of law covered during the traineeship will include human rights and equality law; education law including SEND; inclusion and equality of access to public services; health and social care; mental health and capacity law; children's rights in care; children's rights in police custody; stop and search powers; housing and youth homelessness; rights of asylum seeking and migrant children to access services.

The trainee will receive further training to develop their knowledge and experience in conducting strategic litigation, judicial review procedure and developing legal strategies for broader impact public interest case outcomes, combining policy and media engagement with legal skills training. The trainee will have opportunities to attend policy meetings with a wide range of stakeholders and duty bearers to influence children's rights compliant legislation, policy and practice.

As we have a small but highly specialist legal and policy team, the trainee will have an opportunity to work intermittently with everyone within the team.

Person Specification

Criteria	Essential	Desired
Qualifications / Education / Knowledge		
Degree in Law or academic qualification that renders the candidate eligible to apply to the Solicitor's Practice Course at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies, Queen's University, Belfast	X	
Ability to demonstrate knowledge of one or more of the following areas: • Children's rights • Human rights • Equality law • Child and family law • Education law • Special Educational Needs • Disability • Public and Administrative Law • Health and Community Care • Social Welfare • Mental Health Law • Housing law • Children in need • Immigration and Asylum Law • Youth Justice • Access to Justice	X	
Knowledge of the Human Rights Act 1998, European Convention on Human Rights and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	X	
Knowledge of the children's voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland	X	
Knowledge of domestic law relating to children in Northern Ireland, including equality legislation	X	
Knowledge of legal issues and access to justice issues affecting marginalised and disadvantaged children and young people and communities	X	
Relevant Experience		
Experience of advocacy or representation work		X
Experience of having worked directly with children and young people		X
Experience of providing legal advice		X

Experience of working in the children's rights or children's voluntary and community sector		X
Experience of working or volunteering in the areas of children's rights or law relating to children and young people		X
Experience of producing information materials and/or training resources		X
Experience of undertaking legislative or policy commentary		X
Abilities / Aptitudes / Skills		
Ability to work as part of a small multi-disciplinary team and work on own initiative		X
Ability to communicate effectively with children and young people and callers or clients who are vulnerable, in distress or in crisis	X	
Ability to initiate, plan and prioritise a varied and pressurised work load to meet deadlines	X	
Excellent written and oral communication skills	X	
Ability to negotiate and advocate with professionals and other third parties on behalf of clients		X
Computer literacy	X	
Willingness to travel as required to carry out duties of the post	X	
Willingness from time to time to work outside normal working hours	X	
Ethos		
A commitment to the ethos of the Children's Law Centre	X	
A commitment to children's rights	X	
A commitment to the principle of equal opportunities	X	
A commitment to children's participation	X	

This job description is intended to provide an overview of the core responsibilities of the post. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every activity the post holder does. Job descriptions can be subject to reasonable change as the role evolves without fundamentally changing terms and conditions. Children's Law Centre reserves the right to change and amend specific duties or tasks within reason and to ask post holders to carry out other reasonable duties as and when required to do so.

Testimonial



Having had an interest in Children's Rights from a young age, I always admired the work and ethos of the Children's Law Centre and I am therefore honoured to have completed my traineeship there, where I continue to work as a qualified solicitor.

Through my studies, work experience and employment, I have seen first-hand how little say young people have in some situations impacting their lives, despite the fact Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to have their voices heard in all matters concerning them.

The Children's Law Centre exhibits an environment in which children are recognised as the most important parties in the court process and one which endeavours to reduce the anxiety and stress children and their families feel as much as possible.

The Justice First Fellowship scheme, through the Legal Education Foundation, has not only allowed me to live out my dream career but it has also welcomed me into a circle of like-minded people, all of whom I would probably never have met otherwise, and some of whom I now have the pleasure of calling friends.

I feel so lucky to be part of such an amazing programme and being able to carry out the work I do on a daily basis. I represent vulnerable children and young people and advocate for their rights to ensure that all children are valued, have their rights protected and can participate without discrimination.

The work we do at CLC allows me to give a voice to those children who don't have a voice or feel like they aren't being heard.

I feel privileged to be part of an organisation that contributes to desperately needed changes in law that will change the lives of children for the better.

The ability to complete a training contract at CLC is a unique opportunity that enables you to use law as a tool to support social change and make a difference.

Emma-Rose Duffy

Solicitor and Justice First Fellow

How to Apply

To apply applicants should complete an online application form on the Legal Education Foundation website, available at <https://lef.org.uk/justice-first-fellowship/how-to-apply>

The application deadline is 28th November 2025.

It is anticipated that interviews will be held in-person at CLC on Tuesday 27th and Wednesday 28th January 2026.

Children's Law Centre

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CHALKY Freephone Advice Line:
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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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Company Registration No. NI033998 (Northern Ireland)

