

Welcome to the May 2020 edition of our Strengthening Civil Society newsletter

Organisations who hold grants in our Strengthening Civil Society programme (Using the Law for Social Change) have been doing amazing work to respond to the COVID-19 crisis – meeting ever more demand for legal advice and challenging the Government on issues affecting vulnerable people who are being overlooked or discriminated against in support and guidance.

We have compiled this newsletter to share examples of the work going on, including useful resources, sources of advice and awareness-raising.

AND we are also delighted to announce **new funding to support legal action** related to COVID-19 – see the first item below.

ABOUT THE STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY PROGRAMME



This issue's highlight

New funding opportunities

This week we have launched three new funding streams to support our grantees and broader civil society tackle the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This funding will run throughout 2020 and represents a commitment of up to £1 million to supporting civil society at this time.

The first fund – Supporting legal action related to Covid-19 – is open to all and offers up to £40,000 to undertake legal action of different kinds to support vulnerable communities.

The second and third funds will support existing grantholders and previous grantholders of this programme.

Also to note, our **Implementation of successful litigation fund** is open throughout 2020 with the next deadline on 20 May at 9am.

MORE INFORMATION HERE



The courts and the rule of law



Public Law Project

PLP are monitoring the current operation of courts and tribunals and would like to hear the experiences of users. Please do fill **in their survey here** if you can.

They are also working to scrutinize the Government's emergency legislation and are interested in hearing from the charity and legal advice sector about the impact of this legislation on their work – more details about how **to get in touch here**.

Maternity rights



Birthrights

Birthrights have produced a **statement and FAQ on rights in maternity care during the crisis**. They have seen a huge increase in demand for their advice service and are particularly concerned about the removal of the right to have a birth partner before, during and after labour; **suspension of some maternity services, including home birth**; restricted access to pain relief and rationing of elective caesarean sections. Birthrights has been writing to trusts and have seen a number of trusts change policies as a result.

Maternity Action

Maternity Action are responding to huge demand for advice on **social media** and **on their website** from women concerned about their legal rights and benefits during pregnancy and maternity leave and on their health and safety at work during the pandemic.

They have directly **raised with the Government** concerns over both the emergency Job Retention scheme and Self-Employment Support Scheme which leave pregnant women, new mothers and parents disadvantaged.

They are also **joining with other bodies to call for NHS charging to be suspended** during the crisis, including for migrant women which is the focus of the **All Mothers campaign**.

Children's rights



Coram Children's Legal Centre

Coram CLC have been looking at the implications of the Coronavirus Act 2020 for children with special educational needs (SEN) and have produced **an FAQ for those caring for children with education, health and social plans here**.

Family Rights Group

Family Rights Group have produced **advice for kinship carers on helping children maintain contact** with the people important to them even if they can't visit them and **advice for families with a child in the care system**.

Clan Childlaw

In Scotland, **a new law has been put in place for the time being for children's hearings** and for looked after children. Clan Childlaw have put together a guide to **the specific changes that people might need to know**. They have also launched **a survey to hear how the lockdown is affecting children** and young people to help them shape their services.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller rights



Friends, Families and Travellers and London Gypsies and Travellers

GRT communities experience serious health inequalities and many people are disproportionately at risk from coronavirus.

FFT have **joined with other organisations including London Gypsies and Travellers to call on** public health authorities to give guidance on how to self-isolate on boats, sites and encampments and for the Government to provide clear guidance to local authorities on how they should be supporting GRT communities at this time. They have also produced **a suite of advice** for GRT communities (on how to keep safe, on eviction, and on self-employment support) and also for local authorities on what their duties are to support them.

London Travellers and Gypsies have been liaising with London's Deputy Mayor for Housing over ensuring there are no **evictions on GLA land across the capital.**

Domestic violence



Public Interest Law Centre

The COVID-19 lockdown has **had a disproportionate and terrible impact on victims and survivors of domestic violence** who are

unable to leave violent homes.

Public Interest Law Centre (PILC) and Solace Women's Aid, along with many others, **have written to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government** to demand that urgent action is taken, and PILC and Southall Black Sisters have just launched a legal challenge on the Government's failure to provide funding for safe accommodation.

You can **join the email campaign to put pressure on here**.

Disability, health and social care



Inclusion London

Inclusion London raised strong concerns about those aspects of the Coronavirus Act 2020 which loosen authorities' statutory duties under the Care Act to provide care to Disabled people and others. They have a **useful summary of the Act's changes to social care here**. They are now monitoring how the legislation is affecting services and asking people fill in a survey about experiences of social care since the crisis started.

They **are continuing to campaign on a wide range of issues** that are affecting Disabled people and supporting Deaf and Disabled

People's Organisations (DDPOs) to do so as well. New resources include a **template letter for DDPOs to use to raise key concerns with local authorities** and a **template letter that people who employ their own personal assistants** can use if they are struggling to get PPE equipment.

Access Social Care

Access Social Care is working with frontline partners and other social care helplines to pool the data and identify emerging trends about how the crisis is affecting people needing care.

They are responding to this in a number of different ways, including resources, casework, providing additional training or support and updating their legal rights chatbot (coming soon!).

Resources that readers may find useful include guidance on: **Access to medical treatment during COVID-19 outbreak, Care Act easements** and also here **Q & A on Care Act easements, COVID-19 restrictions – England only**, and on **welfare benefits**.

Access Social Care was formerly the Legal Network at Mencap – and is now an exciting new charity helping people get the care and support they have a right to.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT ACCESS SOCIAL CARE



National AIDS Trust

The National AIDS Trust have provided information on the impact of COVID-19 for people living with HIV. This includes new **legal advice on rights and protections at work** in response to a high number of calls to their advice services from people confused about the advice on the risk of coronavirus related to HIV status and others concerned about their jobs. They are keeping their **blog** regularly updated as the situation develops.

Immigration and asylum



Medical Justice & openDemocracy

Medical Justice – who were awarded funding in our latest open round which supports organisations to **implement successful litigation** – are advocating with many others for immigration detainees to be released.

This is also the topic of the final article in the Unlawful State series by openDemocracy in which **Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) provide a powerful account of the plight of detainees** in a pandemic.

Asylum Appeals Support Project

Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP) have produced **a factsheet on eligibility for asylum support** during the COVID-19 period.

Poverty and welfare



Sustain

Problems of food security and food poverty have come to the fore in the last few weeks in ways that are affecting those already in fragile situations the most. Sustain are at the heart of the voluntary sector response. Focusing on (1) securing food for vulnerable people; (2) supporting local responses and (3) defending the food supply, with their members and other groups, they have:

- started to provide expertise to government at a local and national level on food vulnerability
- joined calls for increases in support for those on low incomes which has resulted in some improvements including a modest increase in universal credit
- helped to secure a commitment to continue to provide free school meals for vulnerable children.

You can find more information about **Sustain's response** on their website.

Photo by John Cameron on Unsplash

Public Law Project

And coming full circle, we finish with PLP who have produced a **short series of FAQs here for Universal Credit advisers and claimants** – including the 100,000s of new people who have signed up – to help them make better sense of what could be expected of them during the COVID-19 period.



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