

Ballymun Community Law Centre



Legal Advice



Education



Mediation



Annual Report 2020

Welcome

Contents

Contact Details & Advice Clinics	1
Board of Directors & Staff	2
Chairperson's Report	3
Mission, Values and Strategic Objectives	5
Legal Services	8
Legal Education Programme	12
Alternative Dispute Resolution Services	15
Financial Report 2020	18

Contact Details & Advice Clinics

Our Office

Ballymun Community Law Centre

Unit 1A Shangan Neighbourhood Centre,
Shangan Road,
Ballymun,
Dublin 9.

Tel: (01) 862 58 05

Fax: (01) 891 68 48

Email: info@bclc.ie

Website: www.bclc.ie

Opening Hours

Monday to Friday: 9am - 1pm, 2pm - 5pm.

Local Advice Clinics

From March 2021 the outreach clinics were suspended for public health reasons.

Legal advice was provided over the telephone and in person where necessary and subject to Covid-19 safety requirements.

Local Employment Office

First Tuesday of every month:

Civic Centre, Main Street,
Ballymun.

10am - 12 noon.

Ballymun Library

Second Tuesday of every month:

Ballymun Road.

10am - 12 noon.

Poppintree Sports Centre

Third Tuesday of every month:

Poppintree.

10am - 12 noon.

Ballymun Child & Family Resource Centre

Fourth Tuesday of every month:

Shangan Green,
Ballymun .

10am - 12 noon.

Board of Directors & Staff

Directors & Office Holders

Chairperson

Catherine Hickey

Vice Chairperson

Paula Reynolds

Secretary

Fiona Gallagher (non-director)

Antoinette Doyle

Valerie O'Carroll

Frank Murphy

Staff

Legal Executive – Full time Job Initiative Programme

Christina Beresford

Project Officer – 2.5 days a week

Sonya Keniry

Managing Solicitor – Full time

Gary Lee

Managing Solicitor – Maternity Leave

Mikayla Sherlock

Solicitor / Legal Education Coordinator – 3 days a week

Frank Murphy

Manager – 3 days a week

Ciara Murray

Chairperson's Report

“Our mission is to work towards an inclusive community based on equal human rights and social justice, and to support the people of Ballymun to access justice as a human right.”

2020 was a challenging year.

Covid-19 presented and continues to present considerable challenges for the work of the Law Centre.

Despite the practical difficulties brought about by the pandemic the Law Centre managed to respond effectively by rapidly implementing the necessary ICT infrastructure with minimal disruption to service provision. It is a credit to the efforts of staff that we were in a position to continue to provide critical services to the Ballymun community throughout 2020 and thanks must be given to Sonya Keniry (Project Officer) and Ciara Murray (Manager) who developed and implemented a Covid-19 Response Plan with the support and assistance of EMS Health & Safety Consultants.

Throughout 2020 the Law Centre continued to advise and represent clients in a variety of civil law matters and provide legal information and advice to local people and organisations. Legal matters involving family, housing and employment law dominated the needs of those presenting to the service. Due to the impact of Covid – 19 there was a significant increase in the number and complexity of telephone calls received by the Law Centre and particular credit must be given Christina Beresford, our Legal Executive, who dealt with these calls on a daily basis while working from home. Throughout the year Gary Lee, Managing Solicitor, met clients by appointment in line with relevant safety protocols and Sonya Keniry supported parties to mediate by telephone.

As in previous years our Legal Education Programme provided a range of courses including Child and Family Law Courses and a variety of lunchtime talks. The programme was successfully delivered on zoom by Frank Murphy, Solicitor.

Much of the work of the Law Centre could not be delivered without our volunteers; mediators, barristers, teachers, lecturers, and organisation leaders. To all our volunteers, thank you for your generosity of time and on-going dedication to provide legal, education and alternative dispute resolution services to the people of Ballymun particularly in these difficult times.

In 2020, Dublin City Council continued to fund us through the Social Regeneration Programme as well as providing us with modern fit for purpose office premises in Shangan Neighbourhood Centre. We are very grateful to Dublin City Council for their ongoing support.

I would also like to thank the members of the Law Society of Ireland who generously support the Law Centre.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow board members and the staff team at the Law Centre for their support and resilience throughout the year.



Catherine Hickey

Chairperson, Ballymun Community Law Centre.

Our Mission, Values & Strategic Objectives

“We understand your legal problems
and we are here to help.”

Mission

Our mission is to empower the community of Ballymun to exercise their rights and achieve social justice and equality. To do this we provide accessible legal, educational and alternative dispute resolution services.

Values

We are an independent community organisation committed to increasing access to the law. To meet this commitment our work is delivered with the following core values:

- Social justice
- Equality
- Integrity
- Independence

Our Strategic Objectives

Increase community engagement. Communicate effectively with the Ballymun community in order to increase the number of people we serve and appropriately meet their needs.

Build organisational resilience. Improve and consolidate our administrative systems, work practices and governance to ensure efficiency, maximum output, high professional standards, and legal compliance.

Develop relationships. Identify and engage with supporters of the Law Centre, communicating effectively the need and benefit of investing in a community-based law centre.

1. Legal Services

- Provision of legal advice, advocacy and representation services to the people of Ballymun.
- Providing advice and assistance by way of general advice and information, and referrals to other services as appropriate.

2. Legal Education & Training

- Providing legal education and training to facilitate greater community legal knowledge and to support the progression of Ballymun residents into legal education and the legal professions. This objective is delivered through a legal education programme which is accessible to participants from other communities.

3. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) services and training

- Promotion of mediation as a concept for dispute resolution in Ballymun.
- Provision of peer, family and community mediation services using trained volunteer mediators.
- Provision of accredited mediation education and training.

Working with Key Stakeholders

Active local networking

The Law Centre continued to work with other local community organisations during 2020, many of whom are facing the challenge of trying to deliver services with reduced and severely cut budgets and now the added challenge of Covid-19. Groups include; Ballymun Community Organisation Network, Citizens Information Service, Women's Resource Centre, Child and Family Resource Centre, De Paul Ireland and members of the Gardaí .

In December we were delighted to sponsor a Christmas Card art competition in two local primary schools, Virgin Mary Boys and Virgin Mary Boys National Schools.

The Bar Council and Arthur Cox Solicitors

The Law Centre is as always very thankful to the members of the Bar Council who continued to provide pro bono assistance by way of legal and advocacy work and also educational support to the Law Centre.

We are also grateful to Arthur Cox Solicitors who have been very supportive of the Law Centre's work this year providing pro bono legal support in developing our practices and procedures.

Independent Law Centres Network

In 2020 BCLC continued to participate as active member of the Independent Law Centres Network, the representative body for the national network of Independent Law Centres in Ireland. The Network currently has a membership of 10 Independent Law Centres, all delivering a range of innovative legal services to financially and socially disadvantaged individuals and communities.

In 2020 our Managing Solicitor worked as an elected member of the Law Society of Ireland Council.

Legal Services



In 2020 the Law Centre dealt with 874 legal matters, a 42% increase when compared to 2019.

Legal Services

Ballymun Community Law Centre provides legal advice, information and representation services to the people of Ballymun. The main areas of civil law that we work in are: housing, debt, consumer, equality, health, social welfare and employment. The Law Centre also delivers an information and advice service in the area of family law.

- In response to Covid-19 in 2020 the Law Centre provided access to legal consultations by telephone, without appointment.
- In 2020 family, employment and housing law issues were the main areas of enquiry.
- In 2020 a significant cohort of clients presented with vulnerabilities requiring support services in addition to legal support. Many of the issues faced by clients were driven by the effects of Covid-19, the impact of being unable to have face to face contact with service providers and family members.
- In 2020 the Law Centre dealt with 874 legal matters, a 42% increase when compared to 2019.

Legal Information & Assistance

The legal information service we provide refers to once off contacts with our office. Legal information is provided by our Legal Executive. Many of these queries are referred to us from other agencies, or people make contact based on word of mouth referrals from those who have used the service in the past.

People often contact the office for explanation, clarification and reassurance with respect to legal issues and legal proceedings; for example, a person may contact the centre in some distress, unable to articulate the specifics of their legal problem. Our Legal Executive will provide information and assistance and refer the matter internally to our solicitor where required. Frequent areas of enquiry relate to family law matters. During 2020 because of the effects of Covid-19 the Law Centre received a large number of calls from clients who were unable to access other front line services and who needed assistance navigating any alternative arrangements in place.

Information & Assistance In 2020 there were 537 once off contacts made to BCLC from people looking for legal information and assistance. This is a 46% increase compared to the previous year. The increase and high number of family related queries reflecting the impact of Covid -19 on different households.	Education	4
	Consumer	8
	Debt	3
	Employment	37
	Family	196
	Housing	66
	Tort	19
	Wills and Probate	20
	Mediation	43
	Criminal	31
	Social Welfare	21
	Miscellaneous	89
	Total	537

Outreach Legal Advice & Family Law Clinics

Up until March 2020 the Law Centre continued to provide regular and accessible free legal advice clinics in the community; 8 legal advice and 10 family law clinics were held.

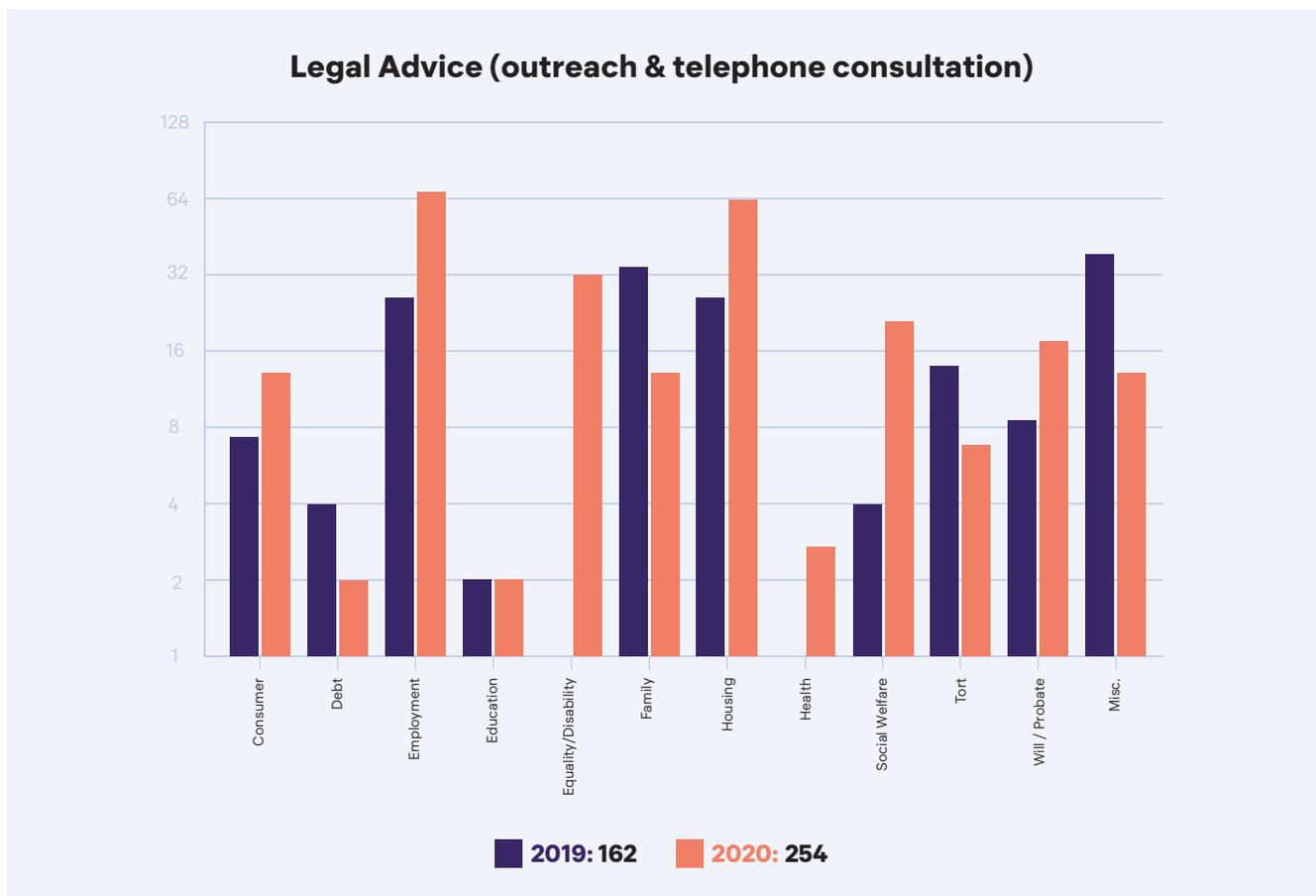
From March with the onset of lockdown an on demand legal advice service was provided. Our Legal Executive triaged queries and referred them internally to our solicitors for consultation by telephone. Where a matter required an in person consultation arrangements were made for attendance at the office with appropriate safety measures in place.

Legal advice (other than family law matters)

In total 254 legal advice consultations took place (this excludes family law consultations).

It continues to be the case that the queries and cases undertaken by the Law Centre are complicated by the nature of the issues faced by the community and the challenge of navigating multiple administrative systems and non-governmental organisations in order to address the issues that present. Furthermore, of those presenting there were a significant number who required ancillary support services such as mental health supports, mediation and family support services and counselling. These issues and needs have become more acute since the onset of Covid-19.

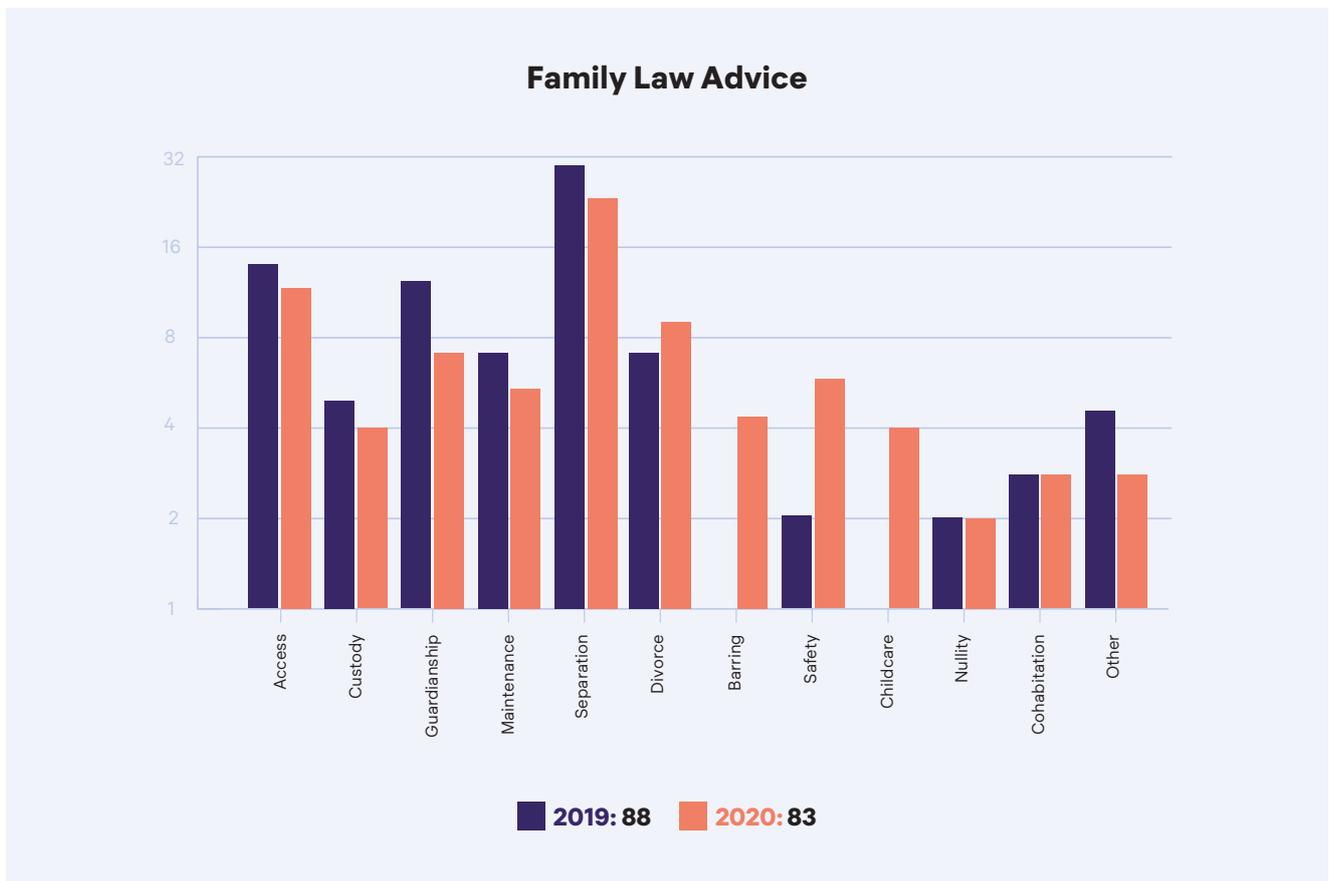
- There was a 57% increase in the numbers seeking legal advice in 2020 when compared to 2019.
- The predominant areas of enquiry relate to housing and employment law issues. The type of issues recurring often flow from the stressors experienced as a result of Covid – 19 . In employment matters include terms and conditions of employment and unfair dismissals. In housing matters frequently related to inability to pay rent and landlord tenant disputes.



Family Law Legal Advice

Our family law advice service provides once off legal advice on family law matters and acts as a gateway referral service. There were 10 family law clinics held in 2020 before the first lockdown in March. Since March family law advice services have been provided by telephone. The service covers all areas that fall within the family law category. This includes advice on legislation and procedures as they relate to the family law issues presenting and referral to the Legal Aid Board, private solicitors and other agencies as required. Information on family mediation is also provided.

- In 2020 there were 83 family law matters referred to our solicitor, a similar figure to 2019. This number is in addition to the 196 once of family law matters dealt with by our Legal Executive.
- With the onset of Covid-19 the difficulties experienced by many clients included: lack of direct access to legal services in person, practical and legal concerns around maintenance and access arrangements, an increased prevalence of domestic violence and limited access to the courts.
- In response to the legal information and access deficit the Law Centre produced a number of information leaflets to assist the public. The leaflets focused on domestic violence, access and maintenance arrangements and family law issues generally.



Breakdown of Referrals	Legal Aid Board	61
	Private Solicitor	8
	Counselling	39
	Conflict Coaching	13
	Mediation	39
	Other	21 (Al Anon, Amen, CFA, FLAC, MABS, Treoir, Women's Aid)

Legal Education Programme



“Accessible legal education and training is essential to grow community knowledge of the law and support opportunities for Ballymun residents to join the legal professions.”

Frank Murphy
Solicitor, Ballymun Community Law Centre.

Legal Education Programme

Our Legal Education Programme for 2020 was managed and in many cases delivered by Mr Frank Murphy with the assistance of Christina Beresford. A number of presenters gave their time freely to the Law Centre, their generosity reflected in the diversity and richness of the programme we were able to deliver.

2020 brought unique challenges. From March the Law Centre quickly moved to an online learning environment and thanks to staff and the enthusiasm of participants courses continued to be run successfully throughout the year.

Lunchtime Talks

During the first quarter of 2020 six talks took place in the Law Centre.

27th January	Accord/Relationship and support services (Rita Dunleavy)
3rd February	Civil Legal Aid (John McDaid, CEO of the Legal Aid Board)
10th February	Family Mediation (Sonya Keniry, Project Officer, BCLC)
17th February	Child Law (Pol Ó Murchu, Solicitor)
24th February	Social Work (Ineke Durville, retired Senior Social Worker)
2nd March	Mensaid (Andrea McDermott)



Outside the Law Centre after a lunch time talk

John McDaid, CEO of the Legal Aid Board
(on the left)

Gary Lee, Managing Solicitor,
Ballymun Community Law Centre.

Law Courses 2020

Family Rights Advocacy course (Level 6)

The accredited 12 week Family Rights Advocacy course (Level 6) is run in partnership with Community Law and Mediation. The course commenced on Monday 20th January 2020. Due to Covid-19 part of the course had to be delivered online.

This course provides learners with an understanding of the Irish legal system and family law in Ireland. Students who successfully complete the course are able to: outline definitions of family to include those in Irish Legislation, identify the functions of the Irish Courts in relation to families, outline the rights, entitlements, services and supports available to families, discuss current issues in relation to rights, entitlements, services and supports available to families, research information relevant to families to include rights, entitlements and available supports.

Introduction to Family Law on Zoom

The course examined what is family law in Ireland today with reference to the Constitution, legislation, case law and the European Convention on Human Rights. Case law was considered in relation to family, children, child care, cohabitation, marriage, separation and divorce.

The Course was delivered twice over four mornings in July and November 2020.

Introduction to Child Law on Zoom

This course was delivered in September/October and considered child law in Ireland today through an examination of the Constitution, legislation, case law and the European Convention on Human Rights. The application of the law was explored in relation to guardianship, custody, access, maintenance, the Child Care Act 1991 and the Child and Family Relationships Act 2015.

Information resources

The Law Centre produced a number of briefing notes and information videos on topical legal issues to assist with the need to disseminate new information as a result of Covid-19. These resources were widely distributed via our website, facebook and email.

Information briefing notes

- Family Law Information & Advice. Information Note 1.
- Children, Access Arrangements and Covid - 19. Information Note 2.
- Maintenance Payments & Covid-19. Information Note 3.
- Domestic Violence. Information Note 4.

Information videos

- Gary Lee talks about income supports during Covid-19.
- Gary Lee talks about tenants rights during Covid-19.
- Emergency measures and persons detained under the Mental Health Act 2001 Video .

Child Protection Project

Thanks to grant aid from PILA the Law Centre completed a public information graphic video on child protection. It is intended that this info graphic be widely disseminated and that it act as a gateway to further digital education and information resources on child protection and child law. With further development of our website we hope to provide a range of legal educational tools in the future.

We are fortunate to be working with a dedicated production team who are providing their skills and expertise at a significantly reduced cost. The producer is Barry Fitzgerald and the animator Cian McKenna.



Law Club in Trinity Comprehensive School

Ordinarily the Law Centre runs a Law Club in Trinity Comprehensive school as part of the programme for transition year students. Due to Covid-19 this programme was suspended in 2020. However, our Project Officer continued to maintain contact with the school to foster interest in the law amongst senior students.

Alternative Dispute Resolution Services



“Thanks to the support and assistance of Arthur Cox Solicitors we have new practice and procedures in place that will provide a foundation to enhance and enrich our ADR services in these challenging times.”

Sonya Keniry
Project Officer, Ballymun Community Law Centre.

Alternative Dispute Resolution Services

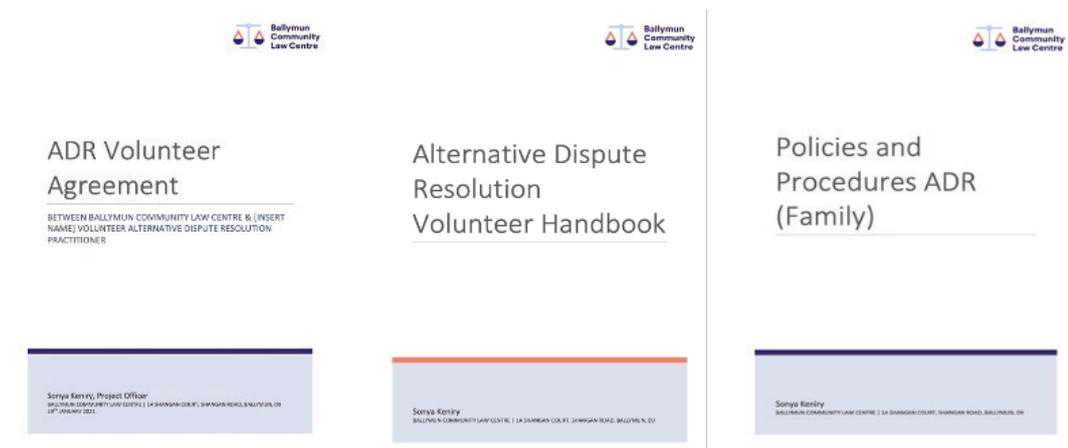
The Law Centre's ADR services comprise: community and family Mediation, conflict coaching and peer mediation in local schools. The service is delivered by a core group of professional volunteer mediators/ conflict coaches and is managed by our Project Officer, Sonya Keniry.

Due to Covid-19 'in person' mediation services were suspended in March 2020. Our Project Officer continued to provide support/mediation to clients via telephone and where practicable existing cases were concluded using the digital platform, zoom.

Re-imagining service delivery

Absent the ability to deliver in person mediation our Project Officer commenced work on devising and implementing new fit for purpose practice and procedures for our ADR services. These documents had to be developed to include the implications of reliance on ICT solutions where protracted restrictions are in place. This work was carried out with the pro bono support and advice of Arthur Cox Solicitors. We are very grateful for their practical legal assistance and guidance during 2020.

The Law Centre now has new suite of policies and documents which will be of significant benefit in maintaining and enhancing the professional standards of our ADR services.



A new suite of documents to support our ADR practice and procedures. Developed with the support and assistance of Arthur Cox Solicitors.

Mediation Services

In 2020 'in person' mediation services were suspended in March. Referrals continued to be taken where practical support and assistance could be provided over the telephone.

- In 2020 there were 17 new referrals made to the family mediation service.
- In 2020 there were 16 referrals made to the law centre in respect of community mediation services. Issues referred to the community mediation service included noise disputes with neighbours, matters relating to building management and individuals referred by the Gardaí.
- In 2020 the Courts mediation service was suspended in March. Prior to this suspension, 5 referrals occurred. For the remainder of the year the Law Centre continued to link in with the Courts Service in terms of emergency support.

Mediation training and support

Mediation training is delivered in the following core areas; community, family and peer mediation in schools.

Peer Mediation. The peer mediation programme in local schools was suspended in March. Our Project Officer remained in contact with the Principals of the schools throughout the year to foster ideas and commence planning for future project delivery in line with restrictions.

Learning and sharing peer support meetings for mediators. Four shared learning meetings took place in 2020. These meetings act as a support and learning forum and are part of the requirements for ongoing mediator accreditation. After lock down in March these meetings were convened remotely using zoom.

In addition, training sessions took place to develop and enhance mediators skills in using digital technologies for the purpose of deploying mediation services via zoom. Particular thanks must be extended to Mary Lou O'Kennedy of Oak Conflict Dynamics Ltd. During 2020 Mary Lou provided her professional support on a voluntary basis for our Conflict Coaching practice. This assistance ensures quality training for our practitioners and we look forward to a continued partnership with Mary Lou and Oak Conflict Dynamics.

Christmas card competition in local schools

In December the Law Centre decided to run a Christmas Card competition in two local primary schools. Our Project Officer, Sonya Keniry, in consultation with the two principals selected the winners whose designs were used as the Law Centre's Christmas cards for distribution to our friends, supporters and volunteers.



Pictured on the left are the winners of the Law Centre Christmas Card design competition held in Virgin Mary Girls National School and Virgin Mary Boys National School.

Financial Report 2020

Income & Expenditure for year ending 31st December 2020

	2020	2019
	€	€
Income	226,174	169,180
Expenditure	198,475	158,069
(Deficit) / surplus for the financial year	27,699	11,111

Statement of financial position as of 31st December 2020

Current Assets		
Debtors	5,553	4,824
Cash at bank and in hand	326,844	301,124
	<u>332,397</u>	<u>305,948</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due		
Within one year	<u>(10,235)</u>	<u>(11,485)</u>
Net current assets	322,162	294,463
Total assets less current liabilities	<u>322,162</u>	<u>294,463</u>
Net assets	<u>322,162</u>	<u>294,463</u>
Capital and Reserves		
Sustainability reserve	200,855	200,855
Capital Fund	33,507	33,507
Income and expenditure account	87,800	60,101
Members funds	322,162	294,463

**We understand
legal problems and
we're here to help.**



**Ballymun
Community
Law Centre**

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 [/ballymuncommunitylawcentre](https://www.facebook.com/ballymuncommunitylawcentre)

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