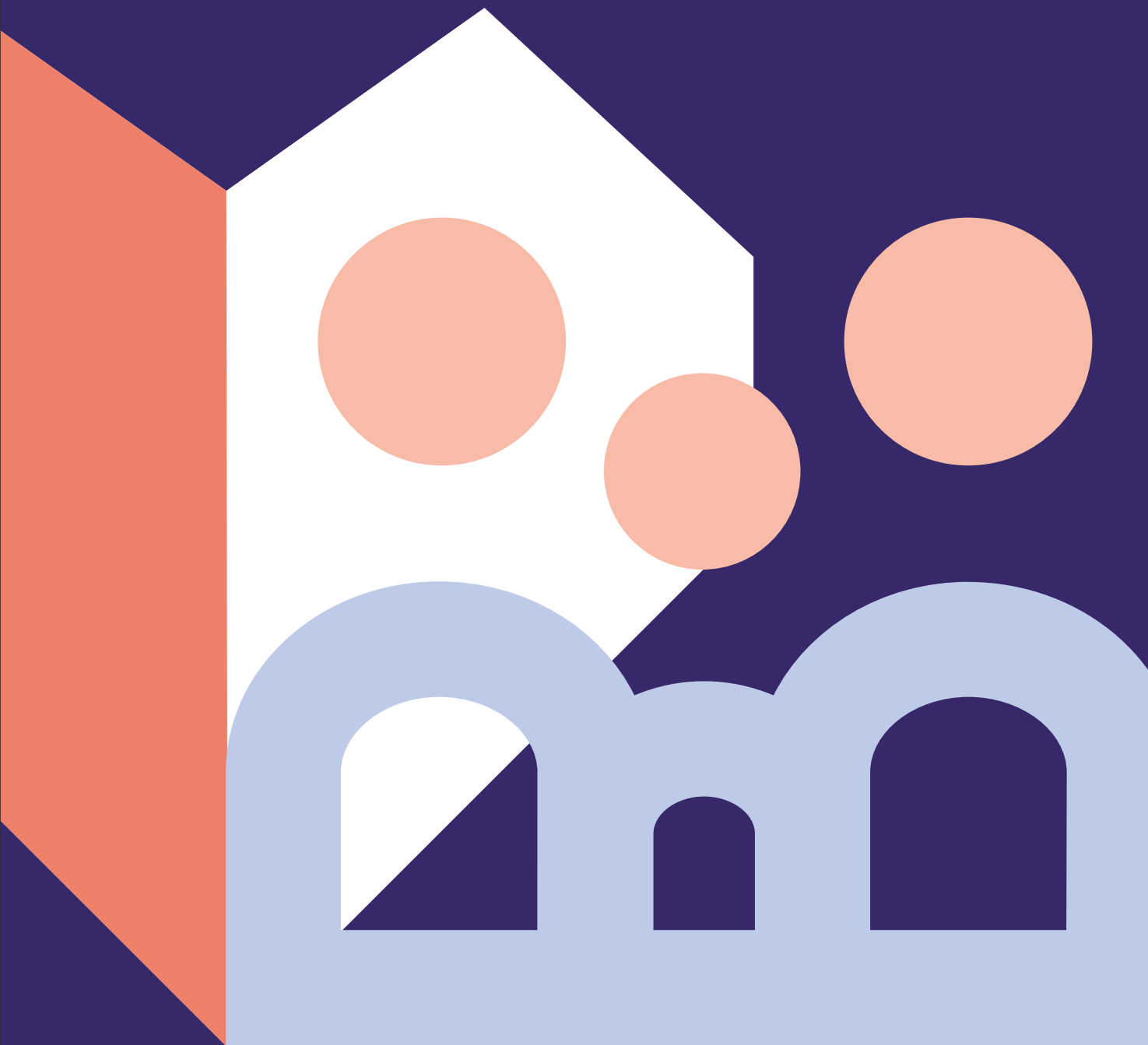
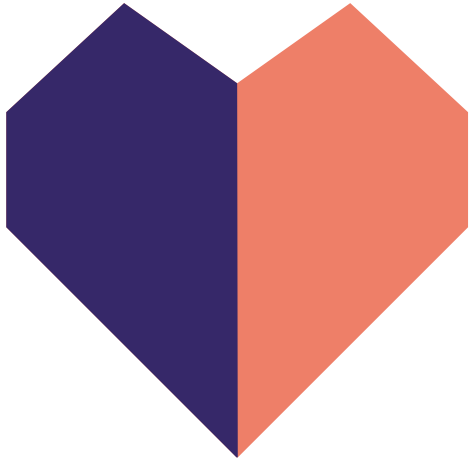


Ballymun Community Law Centre

In the heart of the community

Marking 21 amazing years
working and learning with
the people of Ballymun





**The people of
Ballymun had
a great idea**

The thing about great ideas is that they are only as great as the planning that goes into them. Back in the 1960s, the idea of Ballymun needed two elements to be truly successful: quality homes and quality services. The homes were there right from the beginning, but by the 1990s, the shortage of quality services was impacting the people living in them.

With a severe lack of amenities in the area, and no infrastructure to speak of, the community of Ballymun quickly became isolated, with its growing population cut off from the vital services other communities almost took for granted.

One of the missing pieces of the Ballymun puzzle was access to legal services, with not a single private solicitor in the area. When the European Court of Human Rights compelled the Irish government to introduce legal aid, law centres began to appear across the country, including one in Finglas. But hopes for one in Ballymun would be dashed when no plans for a law centre here were to materialise.

And so the people of Ballymun came up with a great idea, and a great plan to make it happen.

In early 1999, seeing that the Ballymun regeneration project was gathering steam, groups including Men's Centre, YAP, MABS, Welfare Rights, Drugs Task Force, NCI, Credit Union and Local Area Forums, Coolock Community Law Centre (known as Community Law & Mediation today), DCU, Citizens Information Centre, Ballymun Youth Resource, Ballymun Partnership, Ballymun Housing Task Force, Women's Resource Centre, LAB, Garda Síochána, Threshold, and Dublin City Council came together to form the **Ballymun Community Law Centre Campaign Committee (BCLCCC)** to campaign for the establishment of a law centre to provide the community with legal services.

With the right help and support, an action plan was formulated, and in November 2002 the Ballymun Community Law Centre opened its doors and its arms to the people of Ballymun.

As great as it was to be up and running at last, our tiny office in Stormanstown House was not really where we wanted to be – which was in the heart of the community. So that's where we moved, to our very own flat in the block at 32 Shangan Road. There we stayed for eight amazing years, amongst the people we were there to serve.

Coming and going about their business every day, these people became our friends and neighbours, chatting with us when we popped downstairs to the van shop for milk. Soon they became our clients, popping into us instead for advice and a cup of tea.

The thing about the law is, if the people it has been written for do not understand it, or have a hand in creating it, it's not of much value. Worse yet, for many that means it's not to be trusted.

So we saw it as our duty to let the people on our doorstep, literally, in on the way the law works. We wanted them to understand it in a way that made sense through education, courses and workshops that helped them to see everything from family law to human rights from a fresh perspective.

Today, the Ballymun Community Law Centre is still on Shangan Road, but just like the people we lived and worked next door to, we moved out of that flat in January 2011. We found a new home in another flat around the corner in Balbutcher Lane, where we would stay until the summer of 2013. Then, finally, we found our forever home in Unit 1A of the Shangan Neighbourhood Centre.

Having a proper office doesn't just make us feel even more like a proper community law centre, it gives us a proper front door through which the people of Ballymun can drop in for advice and a chat. It seems like we've opened the door too, to more legal services supporting our community, with the arrival of two private solicitor firms in our community.

To all of those who have supported us over the last 21 years – from clients, neighbours, van shop owners, movers, plumbers, electricians and more – we want you to know we couldn't have done it without you.

But to the people and community of Ballymun who have made us feel not just welcome, but gratefully appreciated, we want to say thank you. The truth is we would not be here without you and that great idea you once had.

2002-2003



Ballymun Community Law Centre staff,
(from left to right) Amy-Louise Carey, Christina Beresford,
Josie Matthews and Frank Murphy.

From Stormanstown House to Shangan Road

Ballymun Community Law Centre first opened its doors in Stormanstown House in November 2002. We were off to a great start, inspired by neighbours including the architects, engineers, planners, artists, and environmentalists working on the Ballymun regeneration project.

But made to feel at home as we were, we felt we would be more at home in Ballymun itself. And at that time, nothing was more Ballymun than the flats. Dublin City Council provided us with the keys to a flat of our own in August 2003.

Suddenly, we were people of Ballymun ourselves, grinning and bearing kids playing in the stairwells or doing the odd knock-knock on our front door, and asking our next-door neighbours whether they needed anything down in the van shop, seeing as we were going down ourselves anyway.

2004

We welcomed Mary Robinson to Ballymun Community Law Centre

Josie Airey was the woman who brought about the right to civil legal aid for people in Ireland. Her campaign is one of the reasons we are here today. Another is Mary Robinson, president of Ireland from 1990 to 1997 and who, in 1977, was appointed by the European Court of Human Rights to represent her case.

Mrs Airey couldn't afford a solicitor to represent her in procuring a legal separation from her husband. With no civil legal aid available in Ireland at the time, she believed she was being denied her constitutional right of access to the courts. With the help of her legal team of Mary Robinson instructed by solicitor Brendan Walsh, the European Court of Human Rights upheld that belief and,

in 1979, a legislative scheme was finally introduced in Ireland, paving the way for legal aid in this country.

Mary Robinson believed the Airey case was the most ground-breaking case she took on as a legal practitioner. So we were excited to welcome her to Shangan House in 2004 to visit Ballymun Community Law Centre and see the fruits of her labour.

Below: Trish Scanlon and Evelyn Hanlon welcome Mary Robinson. **On the right, from top to bottom:** Mary Robinson presents the essay prize to Karl Murphy, a student in Ballymun Comprehensive; Mary Robinson with the Ballymun Community Law Centre team; Board members Siobhan Bronn (left) and Catherine Hickey (right) with Mary Robinson.



A giant LEAP toward everyone having access to the legal profession

From an initiative first championed by solicitor Sinead Lucey, Ballymun Community Law Centre partnered with our friends in Community Legal Resource, FÁS, Irish Traveller Movement, and Trinity College Law School to start LEAP: Legal Education for All Project.

The goal was to give people from local communities a way to understand more about working in the legal profession and, hopefully one day, work within it themselves.



Giving the people of Ballymun a different perspective of how the legal system works empowers them with a fresh understanding of the law.



Above: LEAP students visiting the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Nowhere were the LEAP participants' eyes more opened than when we all travelled to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, the site of the landmark Josie Airey case and the foundation upon which legal aid and Ballymun Community Law Centre is built.

A ground-breaking educational initiative in Ballymun

As the law centre's housing litigation list lengthened, Professor Padraic Kenna, Director of the Centre for Housing Law, Rights and Policy at the School of Law, University of Galway, developed the first course in Ireland on housing law and policy.

Having visited Ballymun in the summer of 2006, he saw the huge amount of interest in this area from students at Ballymun Community Law Centre. So, on his bus trip back to Galway, years before Zoom or Teams would become part of everyday life, he came up with the idea of beaming his course to the big screen in Ballymun Civic Centre using the video-conferencing facility at NUI Galway.

One evening a week for 12 weeks, over 50 students at NUI Galway joined 20 students at Ballymun Civic Centre for lectures on the same course on housing law and policy. Tracing the origins of Irish housing, property and land, social housing and social inclusion, studying the law on evictions, and examining and reviewing Irish housing policy, students were able to explore the role of Ballymun Community Law Centre in empowering residents and community workers in Ballymun.

Our students were inspired by the information and learnings they took from the course to make their own contributions to the submission of a new Housing Bill. The highlight of the course for Galway students was the visits to Ballymun and meeting the other 'virtual' but, of course, very real students.

In July that very same year, while hundreds of NUI Galway students received their certificates in Galway, Minister Pat Carey TD and Professor Kenna presented students with their certificates at an awards ceremony held in the Ballymun Council Chamber.



From top to bottom: Pat Carey TD and Dr. Kenna present the participants with their certificates at a ceremony in Ballymun Council Chambers; One of the lectures in session.



2011

Leaving Shangan Road behind. For a short while anyway.

After eight memorable years travelling back and forth between the District Court, Circuit Court, High Court and Supreme Court from our office in the flat at 32 Shangan Road, it was finally time for us to move out, as the day of the block's demolition drew near.

Ballymun Community Law Centre moved from Shangan Road to Balbutcher Lane in January 2011, along with a number of other community organisations.

This was by no means bad news. In fact, the great thing about the relocation to Balbutcher Lane was that it gave us a more visible presence on the street. This resulted in visitor numbers to the centre increasing and even more members of the community being able to access our services.

On the right: Primary school students receiving their peer mediation training completion certificates.



Teaching the children of Ballymun important life skills

There is clear evidence that peer mediation is an important life skill for young people, and is a form of conflict resolution that can be used to help tackle bullying and resolve everyday disputes. Having provided peer mediation training to primary school students in Ballymun for many years, we now have plans to expand it out to second level and young adults in 2024.

This initiative has had significant and positive educational and social impact, helping children in their personal and social development, particularly when it comes to managing relationships and conflicts.

With the increasing lack of communication and social skills among young people today, Ballymun Community Law Centre continues to deliver a peer mediation programme in local primary schools that has paid dividends for the students and the community.

The Law Club in Trinity Comprehensive

Ballymun Community Law Centre was delighted to be invited back into Trinity Comprehensive secondary school in 2011 to work with the transition year students of the Law Club, providing students with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the law.

As well as a series of lectures we gave on various aspects of the law, we accompanied the students on a visit to the Central Criminal Court, which was followed by a talk on criminal law that really engaged the students.

The culmination of each year for the Law Club is a mock trial which, in its first year, was presided over by The Hon. Mr. Justice Richard Johnson, former president of the High Court. As part of these mock trials, students write their own scripts and act out their roles with great commitment and enthusiasm.

Below and on the right: Mock trial in session presided over by The Hon. Mr. Justice Francis Murphy.





We held a Community Law Festival

Ireland's first ever Community Law Festival was held in 2012, marking 10 years of Ballymun Community Law Centre, and was a fantastic collaboration between Ballymun Community Law Centre and Maria Nestor, PhD Candidate Trinity College, Barry Fitzgerald B.L., DCU, Axis Theatre, UNICEF, Trinity Comprehensive secondary school, the Law Society, and the Bar Council.

The purpose of the festival was to encourage people who may face significant challenges in accessing justice to recognise and embrace law as a potentially positive force in their lives.

The focus of the Community Law Festival was Children and the Law, so all of the events were aimed at getting young people, children and their families to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the law. Events during the week of the festival included:

- + Pop-up Law Library with legal books donated by the Law Society and the Bar Council
- + Daily café conversations on a variety of current issues around children in Ireland
- + Daily child and family legal advice clinics
- + Post-referendum seminar with Tanya Ward and Pól ÓMurchú
- + 10th anniversary celebration for Ballymun Community Law Centre
- + "That Night Follows Day", a theatre production in Axis written and performed by 8-14-year-olds
- + Law book display in Ballymun library



Above: Cutting the cake with Dessie Ellis, TD; Lord Mayor of Dublin, Andrew Montague; Minister of State, Róisín Shortall; Paul Kane, Director of Ballymun Community Law Centre.

Marking 21 amazing years working and learning with the people of Ballymun

2013

Our new offices in Shangan Neighbourhood Centre

In July 2013 we returned to Shangan Road, only this time to new purpose-built offices at Unit 1A Shangan Neighbourhood Centre. This office was designed with more desk space and more meeting space to better process all of our legal case work.

Our old office, once a hive of legal activity, may have become nothing but a memory, but in this new one our minds were very quickly back on the work at hand. Having a front door right on the street made it so much easier for people to pop in, in greater numbers than ever before



“Legal Executive of the Year” every year, as far as we were concerned

Above: Christina Beresford and her “Legal Executive of the Year” award with (left) Paula McCann and (right) Sonya Keniry from Ballymun Community Law Centre.

2012 had been the first year of the Irish Law Awards, when Ballymun Community Law Centre was well represented with Managing Solicitor Frank Murphy on the shortlist for Lifetime Achievement Award, Christina Beresford shortlisted for the Legal Executive Award, and Siobhan Phelan B.L. also making it to the shortlist for her pro bono work on behalf of clients in Ballymun.

But the 2013 event gave us real cause to celebrate with the awarding of “Legal Executive of the Year” to Christina Beresford, an acknowledgement of her commitment to the provision of legal services to the community of Ballymun. Christina had been with the law centre for 12 years at that point and was working her way through a law degree by night with all of our support.

2014

Going to Europe to fight for families living in poor conditions in local authority housing

After five years of evidence gathering across communities in 20 local authority housing estates, Solicitor Mikayla Sherlock led Ballymun Community Law Centre along with partners including Dr. Padraic Kenna of NUI Galway, CAN (Community Action Network), The Irish Traveller Movement Independent Law Centre, and Dr. Rory Hearne of NUI Maynooth, in bringing a Collective Complaint on Local Authority Housing to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH).

Under the Revised European Social Charter, FIDH lodged that complaint against Ireland with the European Social Committee (ESC). In October 2017, the ESC found Ireland in violation of Article 16 of the Revised Social Charter by failing to provide adequate conditions for families living in local authority housing.



Above: Members of the Housing Advocacy Network, including Ballymun Community Law Centre Solicitor Mikayla Sherlock.

Exploring the unmet legal needs of people in the Ballymun area

In 2016 we carried out a survey with Behaviour & Attitudes to establish the awareness of the law centre and the services we provide.

The respondents were equally divided in terms of gender, mainly over 35, more likely than average to have children, and more weighted towards working class adults.

With half of the people surveyed in full employment, 247 of the 306 who responded lived in the core area of Ballymun, with 59 living on its fringes.

Almost 1 in 5 of the people surveyed had been involved in a dispute in the preceding three years, with the most dominant issue being anti-social behaviour.

The highest awareness score of 74% was in Poppintree with the lowest of 20% in the Pinewood/Willow Park/Grove area. Awareness was driven mostly by word of mouth through conversations, with friends and family having the most impact.

Unprompted, respondents had the highest recall of free legal information and advice, followed by solicitors' services, family services, mediation, and citizen information services.

The most helpful services we provide were said to be:



81%

Legal Information



77%

Legal Advice



51%

Legal Representation

Litigation: From Small Claims to Strasbourg

While our principal focus is Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), litigation (from small claims all the way to Strasbourg) is still the bulk of our daily work at Ballymun Community Law Centre.

In each litigation case, an initial meeting with our client gives us the opportunity to take detailed instructions and advise on possible remedies.

There was a time when we could brief counsel and have them draft pleadings in return with an overnight fax, but of course today this is done with email.

Over the years, solicitors Frank, Mikayla, Gary, and now Paul, have issued proceedings in the Central Office of the Four Courts or the other appropriate offices for the case.

We have represented Ballymun clients in courts, tribunals, WRC, RTB and all the other adjudicating bodies. Some of these cases will have been settled by consultation, others with a letter drafted by the solicitor, or by way of a joint meeting, proceedings, hearing or judgement.

Sometimes, these cases make headlines in the newspapers, are reported in law reports, or commented upon in the academic journals. But all of the cases, big and small, are about Ballymun clients, families, homes, jobs, welfare, and protecting their interests.

We must extend thanks to all of the clients who we have worked with on their cases over the years. Our always positive experience means we continue to look forward to working with you all in the years to come.

Increased demand for legal advice during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presented the team at Ballymun Community Law Centre with challenges. Perhaps the biggest threat to our services was our inability to meet members of the community face-to-face, but we were quickly able to put alternative solutions in place.

We experienced a significant increase in the number and complexity of telephone calls, particularly around legal matters involving family, housing, and employment law, which Christina Beresford dealt with on a daily basis while working from home. Gary Lee, our managing solicitor, met with clients by appointment only, in line with relevant safety protocols. Sonya Keniry was able to provide support and mediation to our clients via telephone and, where it was possible, mediators conducted cases using the Zoom platform.

In fact, Zoom became an invaluable tool to us during the pandemic, with it enabling Frank Murphy to provide our Legal Education Programme range of courses, including the Introductions to Child Law and Family Law, as well as lunchtime talks, virtually.

Mediator training could continue thanks to Zoom also, with learning and sharing peer support meetings – vital to ongoing mediator accreditation – taking place throughout 2020 and 2021.



Above: Ballymun Community Law Solicitor Gary Lee records a YouTube video on tenants' rights and the emergency legislation during the pandemic.

We remember Christina Beresford

From the moment Christina Beresford started as Administrator at Ballymun Community Law Centre in 2002, she treated every person who walked through our door – or who she bumped into on the street – as if they were the most important human being in the world. No matter the problem, no matter how long it took to listen, Christina made everyone she talked to feel better about their situation.

She enjoyed attending counsel in the Four Courts. Looking up at the bench, she wondered how the judiciary could be helped to understand what life was like for a client in Ballymun who might have to walk down several flights of stairs in the night with the lift broken and no lights working to get milk from the van shop outside. So she really appreciated the judges who came out to sit on the Ballymun bench for the moot courts in Trinity Comprehensive, and those who spoke to our students in their chambers when she brought them to visit the courts.



Christina enjoyed her legal work so much that she began studying at night for her law degree. One of the first graduates from NUIG's live video link Housing Law and Policy course, she loved welcoming the law students to Ballymun and showing them how our legal centre operated.

It was no surprise to any of us in 2013 when Christina won the "Legal Executive of the Year" at the Irish Law Awards. But the biggest award of all for us was Christina herself, and the 20 years she gave providing legal services to the community of Ballymun.



Above: Christina at her desk in the office of the flat in 32 Shangan Road. **Left:** Sonya Keniry, Christina Beresford and Ciara Murray pictured with President Higgins at a FLAC event in 2019.

2023



Our Legal Communication work in Ballymun receives recognition

Above (left to right):

Ivan Yates, host of the event; Gary Lee, Hayley Keegan, Antoinette Doyle and Sandra Mpanyira from Ballymun Community Law Centre; Richard Hammond S.C. (chairperson of the judging panel).

Nothing is more rewarding for the team at Ballymun Community Law Centre than providing free legal advice, representation, legal education and mediation to the people within our community. But it was still amazing to be recognised with a national award for Excellence in Communications at the Dye & Durham Irish Law Awards in June 2023.

We have seen an 80% increase in demand for our services compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly around housing and employment issues.

For us, good communication is all about being present and visible in the community, where the legal advice clinics, talks and classes we run are helping everyone in Ballymun to become more aware of their rights.

The people of Ballymun fuel our passion

Ballymun Community Law Centre was established to empower the people of Ballymun with knowledge of their rights and access to justice. One of our biggest responsibilities is providing advice and information that will help our community to better understand the law and what it means for them.

Being in the heart of the community enables us to do just that. Having the people who live all around us able to walk in through our door and find out more about their rights is inspiring. We have also been heartened by the young people in Ballymun who have taken up opportunities for work experience in law firms and in the Law Library. It is our vision to see lawyers and future judges come from Ballymun. We want to be there to support them on their journey into the legal profession.

Explaining family law, for example, in a way that makes sense to people makes our work even more rewarding. As the years go by, we are seeing the people of Ballymun becoming increasingly empowered by their improved understanding of the law – realising why specific laws are written a specific way, and why some decisions are more likely to go one way and not the other.

This thirst for knowledge is what inspires us and fuels our passion to keep doing what we do. While we may be celebrating 21 years working in the heart of this wonderful community, we hope to be right here advising, mediating and educating the people of Ballymun for the next 21 years and beyond.



Catherine Hickey
Chairperson

We would like to thank our core funders for the support we have received over the years



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

Thank you to the Dublin City Council Ballymun Social Regeneration Fund (previously Ballymun Regeneration) for enabling the law centre to get off the ground. This support has been critical to the development and continuation of service of the law centre.



Thank you to the members of the Law Society who contribute to us through their Practising Certificate. We are immensely grateful to every solicitor who has contributed to the law centre.

Thank you to our panel of pro bono barristers who generously give their time and expertise. This enables the law centre to provide the best legal services to the people of Ballymun.

There are simply too many names to list of all the people who have supported the law centre over our 21 years. But please believe that we want you all to know how grateful we are for what you have done, and continue to do for us and the people of Ballymun. Thank you!



**Ballymun
Community
Law Centre**

Design: reddog.ie

www.bclc.ie