

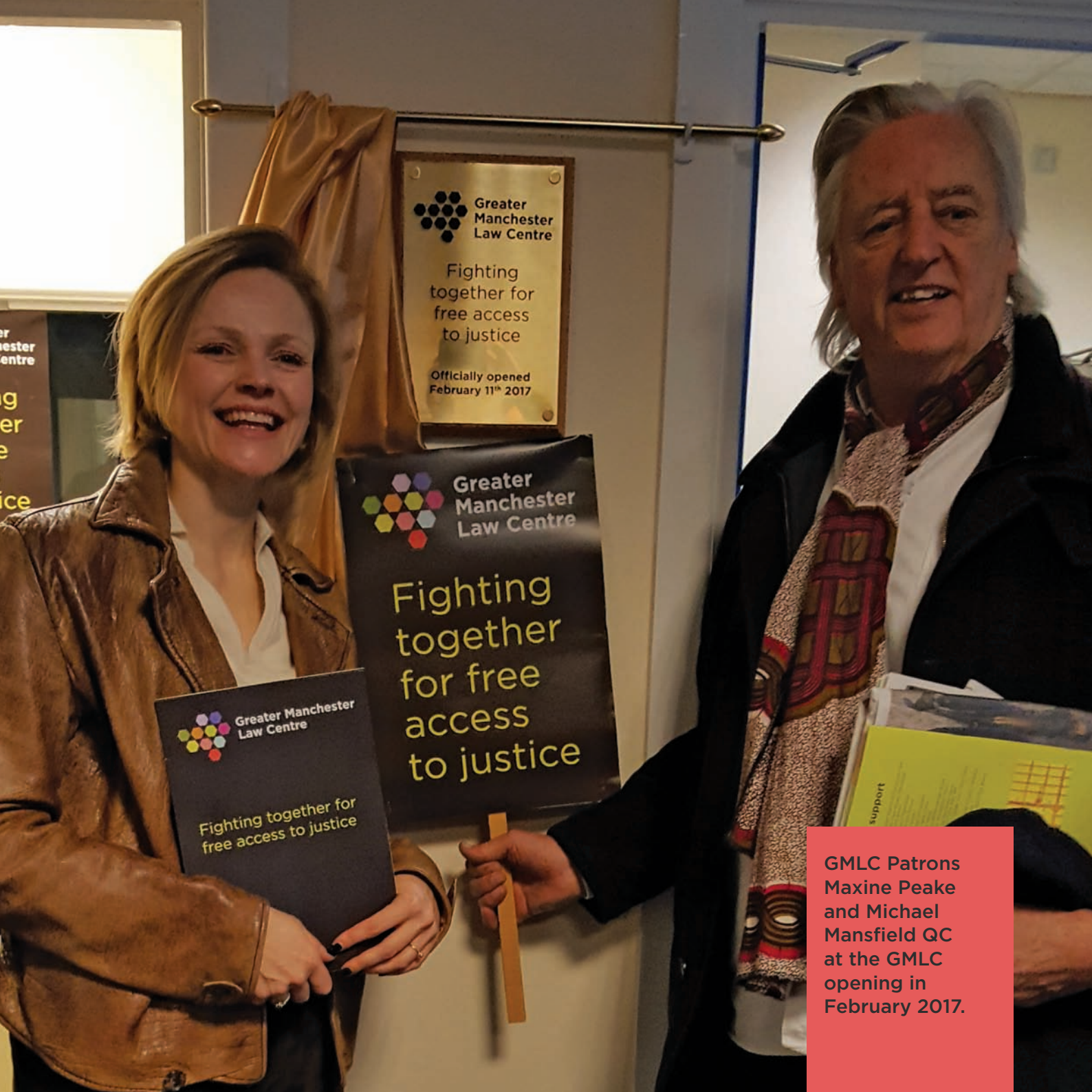


# Greater Manchester Law Centre

Annual Report **2017**







GMLC Patrons  
Maxine Peake  
and Michael  
Mansfield QC  
at the GMLC  
opening in  
February 2017.

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**... and thank you  
for all your support**

# Chair's Report

After the closure of South Manchester Law Centre in 2014 we said: if enough people wanted a law centre, **there would be one.**

In 2016 we opened the doors of 159 Princess Road to the public. **There was one.**

In 2017 **we are building on what we have done and planning how to do more.**

There have been many successes – we have law students winning appeals for people who have lost their benefits. These students have gone on to secure places as trainee barristers, and they take GMLC's message with them as they become part of the next generation of social welfare lawyers.

We have volunteer advisers, week in week out, helping people to avoid and appeal the loss of their Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Personal Independence Payments (PIP). We have frontline volunteers welcoming people into the Centre, listening to them (which is often exactly what no one has done before), and trying to help them find a service. And we have sessional solicitors giving up their own time to give specialist advice on issues such as employment and community care.

When long term Moss Side human rights lawyer Robert Lizar and community activist Erinma Bell unveiled our official plaque and cut the ribbon (which said "no access"), we were hugely pleased to see more than 500 people come to our official opening in February 2017. When Michael Mansfield followed up our General Election survey with his own Election Special, we were likewise grateful for him saying that the grass roots campaign like ours was the way things should be organised. And when Maxine Peake came to listen to our black volunteers talk about the escalating racism they have experienced, we were overwhelmed with visitors to our website watching her

Guardian film set at GMLC and publicised widely. Thanks to all our Patrons for their continuing support.

But people remain in vulnerable circumstances, and this is why we campaign on wider issues. We celebrated when the Supreme Court ruled that the Government was wrong to charge for Employment Tribunals, but vicious benefits sanctions remain, and the likely appalling consequences of Universal Credit are looming ahead. The new Mayor of Greater Manchester has made clear his commitment to ending homelessness, but there is a long way to go before there is enough affordable housing for people in need. We will demand justice for the residents of Grenfell Towers just as we do for the Hillsborough families and the Orgreave miners, and we will demand that action is taken to prevent any such tragedy taking place in Greater Manchester.

In other words, we will continue to do what we said we would this year – fighting together for free access to justice.

We want to make sure that anyone in any of the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester has access to face-to-face advice – not just over the phone or computer. We are pleased to be discussing the future of Greater Manchester legal advice funding with the new Greater Manchester Combined Authority and with supportive law firms. Our Legal Academic Services Board continues to bring the law

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schools together, so that their students can work with GMLC to represent people in appeals and tribunals, and get involved in our local campaigns.

This year has also seen us promote the campaign for Legal Aid generally. While volunteers increasingly offer their time and energy, we are not going to let the Government off the hook. We will continue to work with others, so that the political parties, the elected representatives, the lawyers' firms, the Universities, the Trades Unions and the community campaigns can join with us in putting pressure on the decision makers to put Legal Aid back into its place as an essential part of the Welfare State. Our message has been shared in legal journals, such as Counsel and the Haldane Society's Socialist Lawyer, and in progressive law publications such as Legal Action and the Justice Gap, as well as in the mainstream Guardian Comment. We will continue this media activity and similarly



**...with the continuing help and support (time and money!) there will be legal challenges to the iniquity and injustice facing so many people.**

encourage the Law Centre Network to take up their campaigns for law centres generally – and thank them for their support of our own development.

Specifically this coming year we want our lawyers (paid and unpaid) to begin to take Strategic Litigation, or what we are also calling Legal Campaigning. This means that as well as supporting individuals through their own appeals, we want to challenge and change the legislation and policy behind welfare and housing issues. A positive result could mean changing the new and deeply flawed Universal Credit scheme, which would help people far beyond our current reach. Our Annual General Meeting in 2017 is devoted to this theme. We call upon supportive lawyers to get involved with this kind of work (not just to donate their money – welcome though that is!). We work with other campaigns and Trades Unions who are challenging the adverse effects of

Government welfare laws, because we will not win in the courtroom without the pressure of the campaign outside.

And this will need money – lots of it. Without Legal Aid, without rich financiers, we rely on the ordinary support of ordinary people and ordinary community groups, to help us make a reality of free access to justice.

We knew that the protest started with a few of us, furious with what had happened to law centres and advice services generally in this area. We knew that this could not be maintained unless lots more people became involved and took the fight for free access to advice and representation out into new audiences, and new generations of possible social welfare lawyers, and new areas of Greater Manchester. Now we know that it is possible – and with the continuing help and support (time and money!) there will be legal challenges to the iniquity and injustice facing so many people.

**Thank you, everyone, and lets together keep up this fight!**

John Nicholson,  
GMLC Chair

## Services and Case Studies

GMLC offers specialist welfare rights advice and representation for those who are most disadvantaged in society. Not only has the Government removed Legal Aid for those who seek help with the overly complicated benefit system, they have introduced a host of welfare reforms to slash billions from the welfare budget.

Our specialist advisors help people from the very start by assisting them to complete ESA, Universal Credit and PIP claim forms. These forms are not simple, but the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), and later the Tribunals Service, use these to assess entitlement to benefits, and claims can be severely compromised if vital information is missed at the very start.

Our work focuses on the needs of clients who are unable to access this support anywhere else. Face-to-face advice is particularly important for vulnerable clients. All our specialist volunteer advisors have extensive knowledge of welfare benefits appeals and have successfully challenged DWP decisions both at review and appeal stage.

**“I cannot praise highly enough the support and professionalism shown to myself during the process of Mandatory Reconsideration for PIP. The Greater Manchester Law Centre and my volunteer advisor Shaheen Mansoor kept me informed every step of the way.”**



GMLC case worker Anne Faulkner receiving heartfelt thank you from a client.

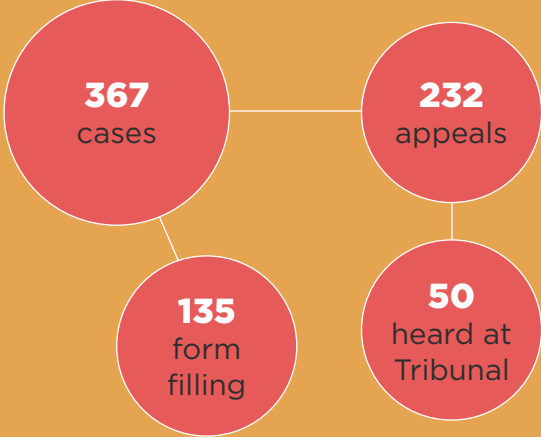
We want to thank you so much for all the wonderful help & advice you have given to us;

Thank You So Much

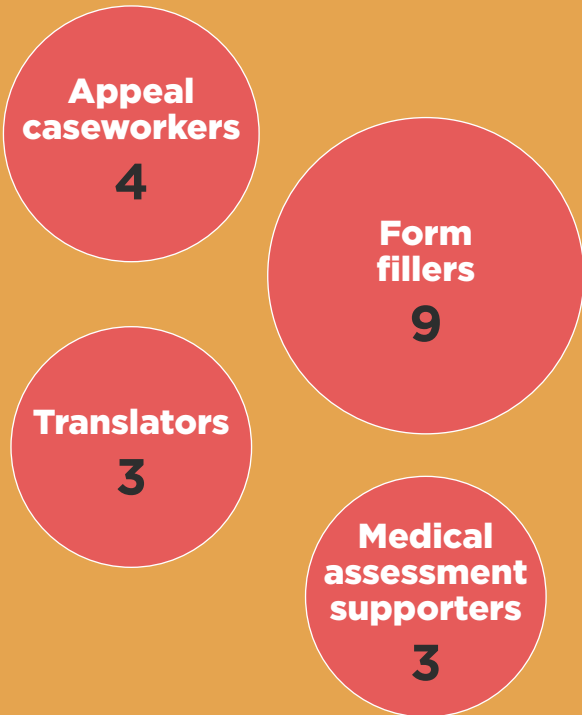
We appreciate the time & effort you have given, & think the work you do is incredible!

We wish the world was full of people like you!!

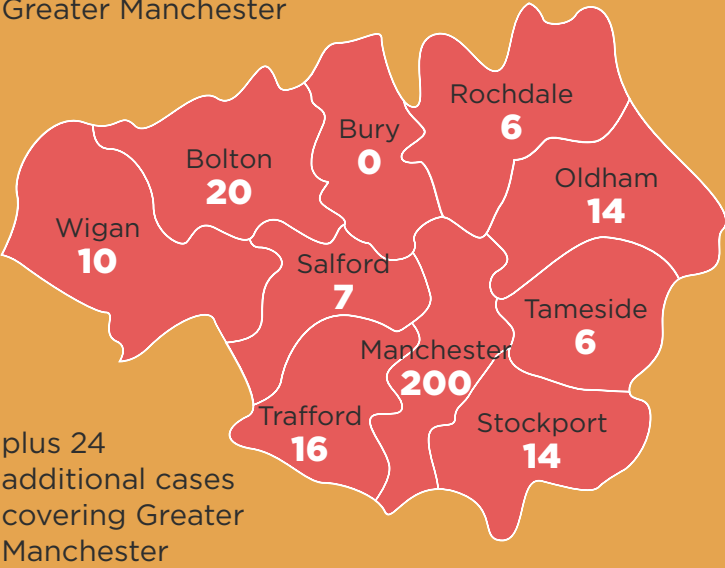
August 2016 to March 2017



Working with our amazing volunteers



GMLC cases accross Greater Manchester



September 2016 to September 2017



A Tragedy of Justice Denied

A 63 year old man with a heart condition came to GMLC after he had failed the ESA Work Capability Assessment and was found fit for work in August 2016. He had already lodged his appeal. He had not claimed any benefits in the interim, and we advised that he could reclaim the basic rate of ESA whilst he waited for his appeal hearing – he told his advisor that he had rent arrears and had lived off credit from his local corner shop.

The Decision Maker had awarded nil points, meaning he was denied benefits. He attended an appeal in February 2017 represented by GMLC. Supporting evidence was obtained from a specialist nurse at his local hospital who knew the severity of his condition well. It was a success: the tribunal decided that he was not fit for work and placed him into the Support Group on the basis that there was a substantial risk to his health if he were found capable of Work Related Activity.

A few weeks after the appeal he returned to us, showing us a letter asking him to attend a Mandatory Work Focused Interview. Clearly the decision had not been implemented properly by the DWP. We asked his local MP to make representations on his behalf, which she did.

A month later the DWP informed the MP that the client had died.

**We fight to prevent these tragic consequences of injustice.**

Working with GMIAU

One client was very unwell and claimed Income Support as a single person, even though she had been married since 2002. This is because the client’s husband was not a British national and had no recourse to public funds.

One day, the benefit agency demanded £20,000 from the client in repayments. They stated that our client had unlawfully claimed benefits for her husband, even though she had declared that he was fighting his immigration status and not entitled to public funds.

After many years of fighting, the couple resolved his immigration status through the courts. However, they were still being asked to repay £20,000 in benefits, and they couldn’t afford a lawyer to argue their case. The Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU) referred them to us for support.

We assisted them and were successful in appealing against an overpayment of Income Support amounting to £16,381.29, and an overpayment of ESA of £3,834.25.

**Free of the repayments and with established immigration status, the couple were free to begin again in getting the Income Support they needed.**



# Facilities and GMLC Opening

The GMLC steering group began looking for premises in 2016.

In July 2016 we began renting 159 Princess Road, Moss Side, M14 4RE from Moss Side & Hulme Community Development Trust.

Two volunteers took responsibility for cleaning, furnishing, organising utilities and getting the building ready to be opened to the public. We managed this with limited funds by being given desks and chairs and using Emmaus homeless charity shops.

Initially we recruited seven volunteers to manage reception, produce leaflets and procedures and develop contacts.

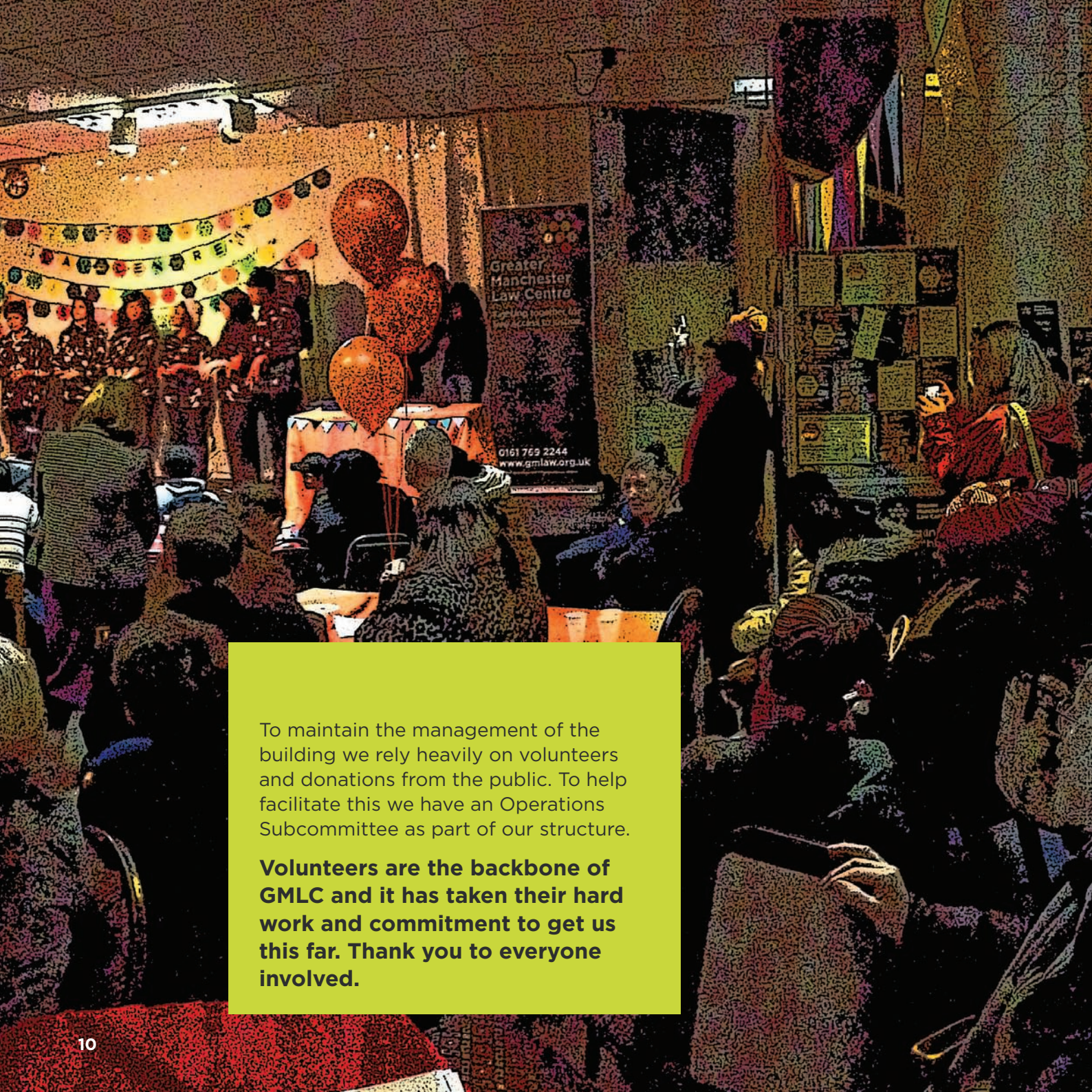
In September we began to offer limited services. At the same time we increased our volunteer recruitment drive and requests for donations building up to the AGM.

At the beginning of 2017 we were granted Law Centre status through getting funding to employ a supervising solicitor and therefore being accepted as a member of the Law Centres Network.

**We had an official opening on 11th February 2017. This was a great event with hundreds of people attending.**







To maintain the management of the building we rely heavily on volunteers and donations from the public. To help facilitate this we have an Operations Subcommittee as part of our structure.

**Volunteers are the backbone of GMLC and it has taken their hard work and commitment to get us this far. Thank you to everyone involved.**

# Campaigning and Fundraising

## Why do we campaign?

From the beginning, we have been more than a Law Centre. We are a campaign for access to justice. We demand free legal advice and representation for all who need it, and we challenge unjust legislation and policy.

In practice, this means ensuring our elected representatives keep Legal Aid on the political agenda. It means calling on the rest of the legal sector to support us in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. It means building a sustainable volunteer base, because we are run by and for our community. It means producing hard-hitting commentary on topical issues. It means working with similar organisations to maximise our shared impact. It means creating innovative ways of funding our survival. We are fighting, together, for free access to justice, and this requires a multitude of tactics.

## #GE17 and a levy for free access to justice

The 2017 General Election was a major campaigning opportunity. We published our analysis of party manifestos, and our survey of Greater Manchester election candidates. We aimed firstly to help our supporters to make an informed decision in choosing a candidate committed to an effective welfare and justice system. Secondly, by sending our questions to prospective elected representatives, we were ensuring that access to justice remained on their agenda, alongside other vital rights such

as access to healthcare and education. We received instant responses online, including a letter of support from Michael Mansfield QC.

“A grass roots campaign of the kind so effectively mounted by the new reinvigorated GMLC is urgently required. Huge community base of overwhelming support, combined with actively challenging all political candidates about social justice, is the agenda we should all endorse.”

**Michael Mansfield QC**

Our second major campaign is for a levy on corporate law firms, whereby they would pay into a fund for free legal advice and representation in Greater Manchester. We initially discussed the idea with Andy Burnham





Meeting with Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham.

when he visited our premises in March 2017. By the end of July, we had delivered

an open letter to our Mayor, signed by over 300 community members and high-profile supporters. We caused a stir, as articles sprung up in the Law Society Gazette and on the front page of the Solicitors Journal. Conversations with the Mayoral office are constructive and ongoing. We are pleased to have reinvigorated discussions on funding for legal services by garnering media attention, addressing our elected representatives, and engaging the corporate legal sector. Our impact is testament to our strong community base and the goodwill shown by supportive law firms.

### We are our volunteers, and our volunteers are making an impact

Recruiting and engaging volunteers requires impeccable organisation and communication. We are continually working on our records, structures and volunteer schemes in order to campaign effectively.

Our volunteers made a tangible political impact this year. Our Editorial and Research Group was launched in June, and our campaign volunteers set about writing articles on topical legal issues. We paired students with professionals to make the most of our diverse volunteer base. These teams published sensitive and analytical pieces on the legal issues surrounding the Grenfell fire, on the causes of homelessness, and on the trials of those navigating the benefits system. These articles have been picked up by external news sources such as the Legal Voice, and widely shared on social media. We will continue to provide meaningful commentary on topical issues, so that we can use our platform to bring important legal questions to the fore.

### Fighting together

Greater Manchester is home to many inspiring and defiant organisations who campaign on issues such as homelessness, poverty, minority rights and social welfare. The support of groups such as Greater Manchester Poverty



Greater Manchester Poverty Action – *We Can Do This Together:* Individuals and organisations working to reduce poverty across the city region.



Action, The Mustard Tree and Young Legal Aid Lawyers is invaluable because we know that our struggles are interconnected, and together, our voice is stronger. We have therefore been busy building our network and sharing our platform.

We have been working closely with Trades Unions to support their campaigns and recruitment, and to advertise our services to their members. It was therefore an honour to be a part of the TUC's May Day Festival and demonstration (see cover image). To remain visible in our wider community, we have contributed to a variety of outreach events such as Manchester Metropolitan University's Community Learning Festival and Alexandra

Park's Caribbean Carnival. We are also building bridges across the whole of Greater Manchester, by working with local activists to explore establishing a GMLC branch in Bolton, and supporting the work of similar advice organisations such as the Stockport Solidarity Drop-In.

### Fundraising

We demand the restoration of Legal Aid and the sustainable provision of legal advice and representation at a national level. In the meantime, we refuse to allow budget cuts to deprive our community of vital services. This means being creative to fund our existence. Fundraising events such as quiz and poetry nights allow our supporters to come together. Individual members support us with standing orders and donations. We now have an effective online donations system, facilitating payment at the click of a button. As a Law Centre run by the community, for the community, we need your support.

### Building the foundation for legal campaigning

Our campaign is multi-faceted. At this AGM, we declare our goal of fighting together to change Government welfare reform policies.

We have never aspired merely to plug the gaps left by Government funding cuts, which is why we demand the restoration of Legal Aid. We are now also challenging injustices in the legislation and welfare policy itself. Our volunteers on the frontline of our services see the hardship faced by the vulnerable in our community, and we campaign so that we can use this experience to enact real change.



# Law Students and Universities

The Legal Advocacy Support Project (LASP) provides a high quality legal advocacy service. By recruiting law students, a far greater number of clients are able to access the service than could be achieved by using the same number of staff resources. Law students receive specialised training on a single legal matter, so that they can provide detailed case preparation and representation appeal hearings for clients with ESA Work Capability Assessment appeals.

Giles Elliott, LASP Co-ordinator:

**“It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with the students from the School of Law. Their ability to grasp quickly the details of what, for them, is a new area of law has been impressive, as is the quality of the work they have undertaken on behalf of our clients. They bring a high level of dedication and commitment to their work which is, I know, grounded in their empathy for our clients, and a determination to help those clients overturn extraordinarily unjust decisions.**

**Coming from outside the world of social welfare law, they have brought fresh eyes to aspects of cases that**



Emma Goodwin, Pro Bono Director at Manchester Law School (left) and Giles Elliott (second from right), GMLC supervising caseworker, with two of the four LASP students, Samantha Mayer and Ciara Bartlam, from the 2016 to 2017 intake.

**we have come to accept as the norm. Their presence at GMLC has changed clients' lives, and enriched the work of the GMLC.”**

## Working with other Universities

We thank Manchester Metropolitan University for their support in this scheme.

Greater Manchester's Universities make up a crucial component in our community base, and we look forward to working closer with various educational institutions as we grow.

# Working with Lawyers and Unions

## Lawyers' Group

The GMLC Lawyers' Group has been established to encourage lawyers to participate actively in both providing services for and helping to expand GMLC. This means developing links with local solicitors firms.

In addition, our current vision is to carry out Strategic Litigation, which means challenging law and public policy for the benefit of affected groups. We are, therefore, also looking for people with expertise in such challenges.

We believe that it is too simplistic to say that providing advice on Social Welfare law is enough. GMLC has a wider vision, and we want to tackle one of the subtle consequences of the massive cuts in public expenditure, which is the reduction in the number of lawyers being able to get experience in advising on social welfare law. This has been caused by the enforced closure of local law centres and the consequent reduction in jobs in benefits, housing and employment law advice.

We obviously need money to carry on and are actively pushing, via the Lawyers' Group, for solicitors' firms (and individual advisors) to donate to us.

## Growing relationship with the Unions

GMLC works to develop relationships with Trade Unions, Trades Union Councils and Unemployed Workers' Centres. We feel that the Trades Union movement is essential in supporting workers' rights, and everyone should be encouraged to join a Union. Together we can challenge the dismantling of the Welfare State and fight together for justice.

We want Union branches and Trades Union Councils to help fund GMLC through affiliations and regular funding. Unions can also provide access to volunteers, for example by recruiting retired members.

Affiliated organisations receive our newsletter, and members of affiliated Unions receive information to access our services. We are continually working to support relevant Union campaigns.

We would like to thank North West TUC for their engagement and are please to be in discussions with affiliated unions to plan how to fight together for free access to justice.



# Finances

GMLC is thriving. Over the course of the last year, we have grown our resources, taken on staff, moved into our permanent base, successfully bid for funding from several

sources, helped many clients, and benefited from the generosity of many of our funders and supporters.

	31/3/16	31/3/17	September 2017
Cash at Bank	£5,966	£113,428	£119,135
Regular Donors	1	17	33
Employees	0	3	4
Income	£7.1k	£133.7k	c£130k
Expenditure	£1.8k	£50.2k	c£128k

# Thank you for all your support

## Principal funders

AB Charitable Trust  
Access to Justice Foundation  
Adactus  
Better Community Business Network  
Big Lottery – Celebrate and Awards for All  
Comic Relief  
Forever Manchester  
Legal Education Foundation  
Lush Charity Pot  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Police and Crime Commissioner for Greater Manchester (GMPCC)  
Tudor Trust

Greater Manchester Welfare Rights Advisers Group (GMWRAG)  
Kenworthy’s Chambers  
LGBT Foundation  
Manchester Alliance for Community Care (MACC)  
Manchester Metropolitan Church  
Manchester Mind  
Manchester Palestine Solidarity Campaign  
Metropolitan Congregation of Wilbraham  
St Ninian’s United Reformed Church  
National Union of Rail, Maritime & Transport Workers (RMT) – Stockport branch  
Northern Save Justice  
North West Trades Union Congress (NWTUC)  
People’s History Museum  
Refugee Action  
Safety 4 Sisters  
Unison Manchester Community and Mental Health branch  
Unison Probation and Cafcass (North West)  
Unite Greater Manchester Social Action Branch North West 389  
Unite NW/55 Fujitsu North West Branch  
Unite the Union Greater Manchester Community Branch  
University and College Union (North West)  
Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST)  
Young Legal Aid Lawyers

## Supporting organisations

Access to Advice  
Bolton Trades Union Council  
Cheetham Hill Advice Centre (CHAC)  
FC United of Manchester  
Freedom from Torture  
Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO)  
Greater Manchester and District Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (GMDND)  
Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU)  
Greater Manchester Poverty Action (GMPA)

## A special thank you to the Greater Manchester Law Centre Patrons



Michael Mansfield QC



Maxine Peake



Lord Willy Bach



John Hendy QC



Robert Lizar



Dr Erinma Bell, MBE DL



Dr Dawn Edge



## How to find us

### Greater Manchester Law Centre (GMLC)

159 Princess Road  
Moss Side  
Manchester  
M14 4RE

Buses from Piccadilly Gardens:  
101, 104, 105 and 109

### Opening hours

Monday to Friday  
10am to 3pm

### Contact information

Phone **0161 769 2244**

Email **[reception@gmlaw.org.uk](mailto:reception@gmlaw.org.uk)**

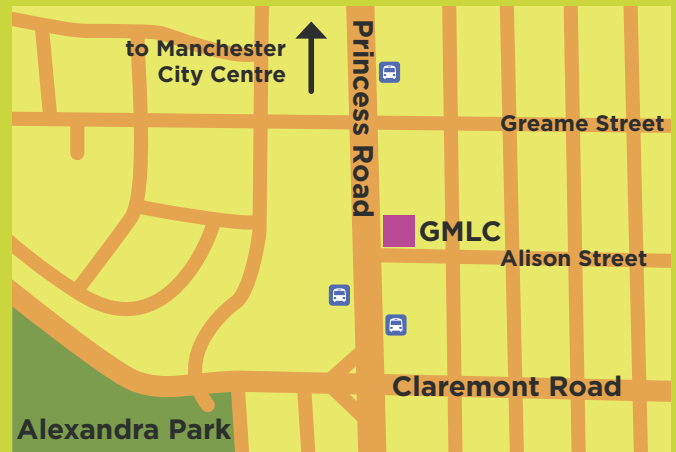


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