



# THE JUSTICE FIRST FELLOWSHIP

Supporting the next generation of  
social welfare lawyers to deliver justice  
for communities

The  
Legal  
Education  
Foundation

  
Justice First  
FELLOWSHIP

# INTRODUCING THE JUSTICE FIRST FELLOWSHIP

**The Legal Education Foundation focuses on the essential role of legal education in helping people and organisations to understand and use the law as a tool for change. In this work, we know that there are significant numbers of people who cannot obtain justice in relation to everyday problems, and that these unmet needs trigger or exacerbate clusters of issues that have a social and economic impact on individuals, communities and wider public policy goals. We believe the law should be readily available at the times and in the places where people need it. In order to achieve this, communities must have talented and committed social welfare lawyers.**



**Matthew Smerdon**  
Chief Executive,  
The Legal Education Foundation

In 2013, the Foundation established the Justice First Fellowship – a scheme to provide fully-funded training contracts, pupillages and wider development opportunities for the next generation of specialist social welfare lawyers. Fellows spend two years working in leading UK organisations, which act as hosts and enable them to learn alongside the best in the profession. In partnership with a growing number of sponsors and host organisations, the scheme has now placed over 80 Fellows who are already meeting legal needs in communities across the UK.

The Foundation and its partners are keen for the scheme to grow in scale and prestige so as to help more people build long-lasting and effective careers as leaders in this vital field of legal practice. We hope you find this brochure a helpful introduction and possibly even the start of a rewarding and long-lasting involvement in the scheme.

# WHY IS SOCIAL WELFARE LAW SO IMPORTANT?

**Social welfare law is a broad term covering areas such as debt, housing, employment, welfare benefits, community care, education, immigration and asylum. It is often referred to as ‘the law of everyday life’.**

Changes to legal aid and pressure on local authority budgets mean that vulnerable people are increasingly unable to access legal help in these areas, even when they need it the most.

Legal advice and representation are nevertheless crucial to addressing disadvantage, helping people to take more control over their lives and to secure fair treatment and protection.

Leaving legal problems unresolved contributes to a range of adverse consequences, such as poor mental health, and prevents progress in many areas of life.

Another consequence of reduced public budgets is that opportunities for aspiring social welfare lawyers to complete compulsory training are scarce, prompting concerns about how the next generation of specialists will emerge. The Justice First Fellowship helps to address this by enabling lawyers to complete their training and go on to a career in which they use the law to bring about positive change in people's lives.



Justice First Fellows,  
2019–2021

# ARE YOU A FUTURE JUSTICE FIRST FELLOW?

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

## You need to:

- ✓ Have passed the Legal Practice Course (or Bar Professional Training Course for Pupillage) in England and Wales, or its equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland;
- ✓ Be able to demonstrate 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 two-year term as a Fellow.

Competition for places is intense, with only the very best and most committed going on to be selected.

While completing the Fellowship, Fellows also work with their host organisation to develop a project that will help advance access to justice. This is a crucial part of the scheme, helping Fellows to gain programme development experience and offering the hosts additional capacity to open up new areas of work and further meet legal needs.

Thanks to the support of BPP University, Fellows access free places on the Professional Skills Course at BPP campuses in England and Wales.

Fellows are also twice a year brought together to receive additional support and training, and to feel part of a movement of lawyers dedicated to serving their communities.

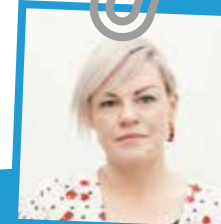
If you would like to apply to become a Justice First Fellow, find out more at [jff.thelegaleducationfoundation.org](http://jff.thelegaleducationfoundation.org)

# SPOTLIGHT ON CURRENT JUSTICE FIRST FELLOWS

My dad is a law centre lawyer. I enjoyed his stories about the work he did. I studied English literature at university and then did support work for adults with mental health problems. I loved being able to make a difference in the world around me – but often felt powerless as there was only so much I could do. After I had my second child, I wanted to retrain and find a way to provide more solid help to disadvantaged people. I decided to apply for the part-time GDL and did law-related work all the way through that and my LPC, which

was excellent preparation for becoming a solicitor. I wanted to get the highest grades I could, as I was worried that as a woman over 30 with children, and a scouse accent I might struggle to obtain a training contract. When I obtained the Legal Education Foundation Justice First Fellow role, all the stress and hard work paid off..

**Siobhan Taylor-Ward**  
Merseyside Law Centre  
2017–2019



There are no lawyers in my family; none even in my home town in Poland. I was the first of my family to go to university. My decision to go into law was influenced by Poland's political transformation in the 1990s. I remember vividly feeling something remarkable was happening and the collective sense of freedom and hope. Once Poland was free and democratic, people turned to courts to remedy the earlier wrongs people had suffered. Seeing the determination of victims and their lawyers to right those wrongs inspired me to study law.

**Karolina Rychlicka**  
Just for Kids Law 2017–2019



I was interested in social justice before I was interested in law. My mum was a shop steward, so I had no choice. I qualified as a social worker and then had a job as a family support worker for the housing charity Shelter. I was basically appealing to landlords' good nature. I then moved over to the advice team, where I learned about the law. I realised that even if you know the law, unless you can enforce it, local authorities won't listen to you. Local authorities are very good at gatekeeping and stopping people accessing the accommodation they are entitled to, without a credible threat of legal challenge it is very difficult to get them to behave.

**Tom Lavin**  
Merseyside Law Centre 2018–2020



# IS YOUR ORGANISATION A FUTURE JUSTICE FIRST FELLOW HOST?

Justice First Fellows are hosted by some of the best social welfare legal organisations in the country. Organisations go through a rigorous selection process and have to demonstrate that they:

- ✓ Are experts in their areas of social welfare law
- ✓ Do work that is of national significance
- ✓ Are innovative, effective, and think creatively about future sustainability
- ✓ Meet the requirements to supervise a trainee or pupil and have a strong training ethos

Host organisations receive a grant from The Legal Education Foundation that fully covers the salary, supervision and associated costs over two years.

The project component of the scheme has already helped current hosts to open up new areas of work and develop interesting new models that could go on to employ Fellows at the completion of the scheme.

The host recruitment process gets underway each Autumn.

If you would like to host a Justice First Fellow, find out more at

**[jff.thelegaleducationfoundation.org/](http://jff.thelegaleducationfoundation.org/)**  
**host-opportunities**

# IS YOUR ORGANISATION A FUTURE JUSTICE FIRST FELLOW SPONSOR?

The majority of Fellowship funding is contributed by The Legal Education Foundation, with our Governors committing £5.4 million of the Foundation's resources so far.

In order to raise the profile, prestige and reach of the scheme, the Foundation has also been working with sponsors in a variety of ways and is keen to develop these partnerships further.

Sponsoring a Justice First Fellowship is not just about helping promising lawyers to train in their chosen field. Through supporting a Fellow's work, sponsorship directly helps the hundreds of people that

Fellows serve in the course of their training. It is a clear way for sponsors to contribute to their communities and to demonstrate a commitment to the role that the legal services sector plays in social justice, both now and in the future.

If you would like to sponsor a Justice First Fellow, please contact us at **[info@thelef.org](mailto:info@thelef.org)**

## £7.5 million committed to the scheme to date

Below are some of the organisations that have hosted Fellows so far:



# HOW SPONSORS CONTRIBUTE

The Foundation has developed five principal ways for sponsors to be involved:

1

## Targeted Host Support

This ties financial support from a sponsor to a Fellowship at a specific host organisation. It is an excellent way to leverage support and build on an existing relationship with a legal advice partner.

2

## Regional Consortium

This model combines contributions from a group of sponsoring firms in a particular region to fund a Fellowship at a local organisation. For example, law firms in Bristol, Birmingham and Liverpool have come together to support Fellows in those cities.

3

## Single or Regular Donation

An organisation can simply make a general contribution to the overall Fellowship fund.

4

## Corporate/Law Firm Partnership

This could be a funding partnership between a company and the law firms it uses or it could be a direct contribution by a company.

5

## Part Sponsorship by Legal Aid Firm Hosts

Under this model, legal aid firms part sponsor a Fellow at their firm.

All the costs of administering the Fellowship scheme are covered, and so any sponsorship goes directly to putting Fellows in place in local communities.

If you would like to enquire about sponsoring a Justice First Fellow, contact us at [info@thelef.org](mailto:info@thelef.org)

# SPOTLIGHT ON A JUSTICE FIRST FELLOWSHIP SPONSOR

**Herbert Smith Freehills is a leading global law firm with 27 offices worldwide. It has generously sponsored a Justice First Fellow at Child Poverty Action Group.**

‘In light of the extensive cuts to legal aid in the UK, the need for social welfare lawyers has never been greater. If we are going to continue to provide meaningful access to justice then investing in home-grown, talented individuals who are passionate about this area is the most logical way forward.

As part of the Fellowship, the Fellows undertake a project that aims to advance access to justice. We see this as an excellent addition to the training contract with the potential to create real change.

We are delighted to have sponsored Fellows at our long-term pro bono partner Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) and are looking forward to working together to strengthen our relationship further. We wish all the Fellows the best in embarking on their Fellowship and look forward to watching them flourish – who knows they may well be our pro bono partners of the future!’

**Emma Cooke**  
Head of Citizenship

**‘In light of the extensive cuts to legal aid in the UK, the need for social welfare lawyers has never been greater’**



# OUR JUSTICE FIRST SPONSORS

Here are some of the organisations who have provided support.

## Foundations



A B Charitable Trust



## Universities



## Bar



## Banks



## THE GLOBAL SUCCESS OF SOCIAL WELFARE LAW FELLOWSHIPS

Social welfare law fellowships are not just a UK funding innovation. They build on a global movement of organisations working to increase access to legal advice and representation for vulnerable people.

In the US, **Equal Justice Works** has put public interest law centre-stage and helped to create a new generation of social justice lawyers who are passionate and powerful advocates in their chosen areas. It now has a range of programmes for every stage of legal education to train lawyers, develop their practice, and give them the experience to become effective public interest advocates.

## Law Firms



Worldwide, **The Bertha Foundation** is sponsoring emerging lawyers with two-year Fellowships to train in public interest law. The aim is to create a career track in social welfare law and to build a network of institutions where beginning lawyers can become part of a global movement of social-impact law.

# THE FUTURE

The Justice First Fellowship is now beginning its next round, and we hope to continue expanding the number of Fellowships to help enable social welfare lawyers meet the growing legal needs in their communities.

Most of all, we look forward to seeing our Fellows go on to long and effective careers in which they make a difference to people's lives.

**We look forward to seeing our Fellows go on to long and effective careers in which they make a difference to people's lives.**

# WHAT TO DO NEXT

## Apply

If you would like to apply to become a Justice First Fellow, find out more at [jff.thelegaleducationfoundation.org](http://jff.thelegaleducationfoundation.org)

## Enquire

If you would like to enquire about sponsoring a Justice First Fellow, contact us at [info@thelef.org](mailto:info@thelef.org)

## Host

If you would like to host a Justice First Fellow, find out more at [jff.thelegaleducationfoundation.org/host-opportunities](http://jff.thelegaleducationfoundation.org/host-opportunities)

# JUSTICE FIRST FELLOWSHIPS IN THE NEWS

Justice Gap, 25 June 2019

## All my days:

**Their previous lawyers had said their claim didn't have merit, so we had to challenge the Legal Aid Agency over the merits. There was the language barrier. They were both extremely vulnerable with an array of physical and mental health issues. We thought they might just be granted humanitarian protection, but then my supervisor messaged saying: "They were granted asylum." That was my first appeal and the best one I have done so far. They came into the office afterwards and brought us chocolates.**

Barbara Likulunga



@The\_LEF

'You have won "unwinnable" cases. You have saved families from homelessness. You have shown yourselves to be at home everywhere from tribunals to the Supreme Court.' Chief exec Matthew Smerdon lists just some of this year's graduating #Justice1stFellows achievements

7 February 2020

Counsel, June 2019

**I rarely wear a suit; I work for the Public Law Project, which is a charity, rather than at a barristers' chambers; and my Justice First Fellowship lasts for two years, rather than the usual one-year pupillage. Becoming a Justice First Fellowship may be an unconventional way to train as a barrister, but it is allowing me to pursue a career at the Bar, and fulfil my commitment to using the law to make a difference. I get to play a meaningful role in strategic policy work and litigation that advances the rights of marginalised groups.**

Ollie Persey

Justice Gap, 6 September 2019

## All my days:

**The Home Office is known for a culture of disbelief, but Albanian children are disbelieved more than most. If you are coming from, say, Syria, there's an awareness of what the situation is like there. But Albanian children are fleeing threats from non-state agents, and there is very little understanding of the dangers they face.**

Esme Madill



@The\_LEF

This year's #Justice1stFellow graduation was particularly special, as the graduates were presented with their certificates by Lady Hale. 'It is refreshing to know there are all these bright people' becoming social welfare lawyers, she told them.

7 February 2020

Justice Gap, 2 May 2019

## All my days:

**Her employer started off offering a pitiful amount of compensation, and we worked it up to a significant sum. They have also agreed to introduce new policies throughout the company, so many, many more people will benefit from the fact she came to one of our outreach sessions, which meant we were able to help her. It all stemmed from the evidence we gathered, so the day I found that was definitely one of my best days.**

Pippa Banham

Law Society Gazette, 18 March 2019

## My Legal Life:

**My work has opened my eyes to the true extent of the problems children face every day, including homelessness, violence, exclusion, and sexual and criminal exploitation. To those who consider these problems to be marginal, I would say that not a single child should ever be in a position when they desperately need expert legal advice to remedy their circumstances.**

Karolina Rychlicka



Find out more about the Justice First Fellowship  
and The Legal Education Foundation at  
**[jff.thelegaleducationfoundation.org](http://jff.thelegaleducationfoundation.org)**

Follow us on Twitter at **@the\_LEF**

Contact us on our website at  
**[thelegaleducationfoundation.org/contact-us](http://thelegaleducationfoundation.org/contact-us)**

March 2020