



# STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY LEGAL ADVICE CLINIC (SULAC)

**2020-21**  
ANNUAL REPORT



SCHOOL OF JUSTICE,  
SECURITY AND  
SUSTAINABILITY

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# WELCOME

## TO STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF JUSTICE, SECURITY AND SUSTAINABILITY



### Dr Helen Poole

Dean of School of Justice, Security and Sustainability

The School of Justice, Security and Sustainability at Staffordshire University is bound by a common theme of promoting all forms of justice in the local community we serve, as well as more widely in society. This includes educating the next generation of police officers and lawyers, supporting the criminal justice system through advances in forensic science, and teaching and researching the causes of crime and inequalities in society. One important aspect of this is the inequalities experienced in access to justice, which Staffordshire University Legal Advice Clinic (SULAC) has been making a valuable contribution to addressing in our local region since 2018. The work of students and staff through SULAC is a key aspect of the School's values and mission, both in terms of enhancing our students' preparedness for the workplace and in delivering our civic responsibility in the local region.

## FOREWORD - TRACEY HORTON SENIOR LECTURER AND SULAC MANAGER

Staffordshire University Legal Advice Clinic (SULAC) was launched in October 2018. SULAC is run as a 30-credit module in the final year of the LLB. SULAC provides free legal advice to the general public and certain sectors of the community across Staffordshire.

The students are supervised by qualified solicitors and academics. The service is limited to a letter of advice on a range of issues including housing, family, consumer and employment law. SULAC currently does not undertake case work or provide representation although the service may be expanded to include this work in the future.

There are around 255,378 people living in Stoke-on Trent (2017). Around 17% are aged 65 and over. It is the 14th most deprived local authority in England (out of 326).

23.8% of children (under 16) are living in poverty. Around 20% of the population are from minority ethnic groups. 24,500 adults have a common mental health disorder and around 11,000 are economically inactive due to long-term sickness.

In the rest of Staffordshire there are around 870,800 people in 309,000 households (2017). Approximately 21% are aged 65 or over. Whilst Stoke-on-Trent is becoming an increasingly ethnically diverse city across the rest of Staffordshire overall there is little ethnic diversity and the population is mainly white British. Staffordshire is a largely rural area which has a few areas of high deprivation.

Based on the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation 49 of Staffordshire's 528 lower super output areas (LSOA's) (excluding Stoke-on-Trent) fall within the top 20% of the most deprived nationally. Staffordshire's population continues to grow and by 2039 the population will have increased to 905,100 (plus additional numbers in Stoke-on-Trent). Staffordshire's older population is predicted to grow faster than the general population.

Around 54% of people over 65 in Staffordshire (excluding Stoke-on-Trent) are thought to have a family long term illness. Around 11% of households are believed to be on a low income. These people are likely to have no assets and be reliant on benefits.

There are a number of areas in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent where families and communities face multiple issues such as unemployment, poor housing and poor quality of life. With these needs comes the need for legal advice.

The SULAC module allows the University to help our local community whilst providing the students with "real world" experience. SULAC's service is a direct response to the difficulties faced by the most vulnerable in our society and to the public sector. Increasingly people are struggling to get legal assistance because of legal aid cuts, court closures and expensive court fees. Many agencies have had budget cuts which makes the situation worse.

# OUR CLINICS

**Shortlisted for Best New Probono Activity for the 2020 Attorney General/Lawworks Student Probono Awards for our partnership project with Lewis Rodgers Solicitors and Staffordshire Women's Aid.**



In previous years SULAC provided face to face clinics at Stoke County Court and various other public sector organisations and community hubs. COVID-19 changed the world so SULAC had to immediately adapt to the restrictions caused by the pandemic.

SULAC usually only runs in term time but in light of the pandemic we decided to continue the service remotely to assist the local community during this stressful time. SULAC already has a bespoke case management system which is accessed online so case files were already easily accessible remotely. We were able to interview clients via Microsoft teams and all supervision was able to take place via teams as well. Clinic worked really well remotely and we were receiving client enquiries from as far as Essex.

At the start of the new term, in 2021 we were heading towards another lockdown so it was decided that we would continue to run clinic remotely for the next academic year. This was extremely successful and again clients were coming from far and wide seeking advice on a variety of complex issues. We received referrals from all of our face-to-face clinics including the hospitals and the prison service. We also continued to receive referrals from Macmillan cancer support and the local hospices.

Lockdown created a need for a new clinic. Domestic violence has been increasing year on year. As a result of COVID-19 those figures increased significantly. Looking specifically at the period effected by COVID-19 the police recorded

259,324 offences (excluding fraud) flagged as domestic abuse related in the period from March to June 2020. This represented a 7% increase from 242,413 in the same period in 2019 and an 18% increase from 218,968 in 2018. In light of this SULAC, in partnership with Lewis Rodgers Solicitors took a clinic, once a month to Staffordshire Women's Aid.

Again, the clinic was operated remotely, via Microsoft Teams. The women concerned would attend Women's Aid so that these women could access the clinic in a safe and supported environment. This was particularly important during Covid as a lack of access to IT equipment and data was a major barrier to ensuring services remained accessible, particularly to the most vulnerable women. The Clinic was supported by trained volunteers from Staffordshire Women's Aid, who accompany women at their appointment if required.

In light of the sensitive nature of the issues complained of, the students shadowed the qualified solicitors who took instructions regarding non molestation injunctions, divorce, child arrangement orders. The clients were triaged for legal aid and follow up appointments with the clients were arranged. If the clients were not eligible for legal aid then the clinic students would sometimes prepare a letter of advice in the normal way.

This clinic was extremely successful, so we are looking to expand this during the next academic year.

# Feedback

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"I found this service invaluable for women who have experienced abuse. It was empowering and a positive step towards my future."

"I'm really happy to have attended the Legal Clinic. Everyone was very friendly and informative. I'm glad SWA can offer this service as I found it very helpful."

"I found it really informative. Everyone involved was understanding and approachable."

# THE **SULAC** PROCESS

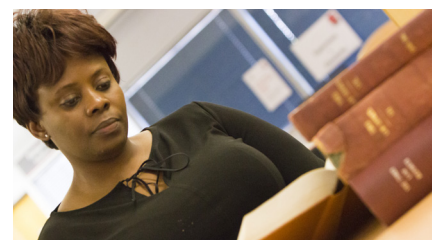


SULAC students are thoroughly trained and supervised in everything that they do. The clinic is managed by Tracey Horton, a qualified solicitor who was in private practice for over 25 years. No client is seen without a supervisor and no letter of advice is sent out unless it has been approved by a supervisor.

Clients are interviewed by two students and their supervisor. The students will then research the area of law

and a letter of advice will be sent to the client within 14 days. No advice is given at the first interview.

SULAC offers advice on most areas of law including family, consumer, personal injury, and housing. SULAC does not offer debt counselling and cannot advise on criminal or immigration issues. Where SULAC cannot assist the students will signpost or refer to another organisation, where possible.





# OUR CASES

Case Details Matter Category	Client Details Count Number of Clients
Civil Litigation	1
Consumer/General Contract	41
Debt	18
Discrimination	1
Education	1
Employment	30
Family	94
General	22
Housing	45
Personal Injury	3
<b>Report Total</b>	<b>256</b>

25/04/2020 – 10/08/2021

# WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY

In order that we can monitor our impact and quality of the service we send a client satisfaction survey out with all our letters of advice. Below are a few comments received from our clients.

Ms C "Thank you very much for the help you and your students do for the people in need"

Mr P "Excellent service from all involved. I am now clear on what I have to do. Many thanks"

Mr M "I just wanted to drop you a quick email to say thank you for your help.

While you weren't able to help directly, the forms and the "idiots guide" you provided were invaluable. With that help I was able to successfully apply myself. You were a great help and I wish you all the best in the future"

Ms T "Was very satisfied. Have been and seen a mediator and she thought you were brilliant and has taken your details"

Ms J "We used SULAC because it was a free service. We liked the idea of giving students experience in real cases. We needed to know where we stand legally before spending any more money"



# EMPLOYABILITY AND WHAT OUR STUDENTS SAY

SULAC is a fantastic opportunity for our students and really enhances their employability. The World Economic Forum, 2016 suggested that the 10 top skills that global employers will be seeking in 2020 will be:

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical thinking
3. Creativity
4. People management
5. Coordinating with others
6. Emotional intelligence
7. Judgement and decision making
8. Service orientation
9. Negotiation
10. Cognitive flexibility

SULAC satisfies all of these criteria. In addition to this it helps with communication, customer awareness, time management and overall confidence. It provides the students with self-discipline and work ethic and several of our students have obtained training contracts because local employers are so impressed with the initiative.

In addition to assisting with employability our students have

also found that the module helped them with their studies, increasing their confidence in group work and helping them to overcome anxiety issues in their personal life.

We seek feedback from our students during the module via a nominated student representative and through questionnaires and surveys. Our students have been delighted with the module. Below are some of their comments:

*"I enjoyed the professional aspect of this module as well as the range of topics that we could help the clients with. I like that it is a different way of learning as you are dealing with your own cases."*

*"This module has helped to improve my research skills. It has given me a fantastic insight into the legal profession, client interviewing and the importance of using a case management system."*

*"Great opportunities to visit different places e.g. the prison, the military and hospital to see how many different legal issues come out of each place."*

*"The module was good in terms of employability and it gave me experience that I was able to put on my cv."*

*"Arguably the best module at Staffs Uni Law School. Invaluable practical experience for students, working with real clients and issues."*

*"Clinic gave me the hands on experience I needed to see first hand some of the tasks required daily by solicitors and how each case differs. The skills that are developed and improved during clinic are outstanding, especially confidence."*

*"Being a part of SULAC was a game changer in my degree, as it gave me the practical experience that I needed to understand how law works in employment. The skills gained through this experience will help me in any profession I choose to follow; interview skills, writing, communication are all crucial in any line of work. SULAC not only made me into a better student, but also made me into a better employee in my current position."*

## The future of SULAC

COVID-19 changed the format of SULAC considerably. Having said that working remotely did have its advantages. We were able to reach clients further afield and help clients who we would not normally have been

able to reach. In light of this, if the world ever returns to normal we will probably retain a remote clinic as well as returning to face to face. SULAC continues to go from strength to strength and we are constantly adapting to the ever changing environment.

### Connect with us

If you would like legal advice or would like to discuss other matters, please contact us:

SULAC  
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ST4 2DF  
t: 01782 294800  
e: [SULAC@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:SULAC@staffs.ac.uk)



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