

15 February 2011

Access to Justice Foundation Announces Vital National Grants

The Access to Justice Foundation is pleased to announce that nine grants have been distributed to national pro bono organisations. The grants come at a critical time for the sector, with free legal advice agencies facing significant cuts in Government and local authority funding. In 2011, the Foundation distributed over £110,000 to support projects that provide free legal help.

A number of the grants intend to support access to justice for self-represented litigants (litigants in person) following the Civil Justice Council's recent report. Grants included supporting the creation of a "nutshell" guide providing clear easy to follow information on court procedure for self-represented litigants. Funding was awarded to projects to build and support effective, efficient collaboration between the advice sector and the pro bono sector including AdviceUK and Citizens Advice. Support for the expansion of the Personal Support Units (PSU) to more court centres in England and Wales was also awarded.

Other grants were focused on supporting existing initiatives such as the ongoing Law Centres Federation project to increase efficiency and collaboration between Law Centres across the nation. Support has also been given to the Environmental Law Foundation during a critical period to enhance its operational model and start a programme to build its impact in UK regions with most need.

The Master of the Rolls Lord Neuberger, as Chairman of the Civil Justice Council, commented;

"It seems clear that there will be an increase in the number of people in the courts who do not have professional representation and require practical assistance. 2012 will be a critical year in which we need to see the CJC's recommendations implemented to help maintain access to justice for such litigants. I therefore strongly welcome the Foundation's leadership in making grants to support this goal."

The three arms of the legal profession were represented in the grant awards. Support was given to the formation of ILEX Pro Bono as an independent national charity, funding for a complete set of computers for LawWorks (the solicitors pro bono charity), and for both a server and offsite email for the Bar Pro Bono Unit to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their work.

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Notes to Editors:

1. The Access to Justice Foundation, together with the network of 7 Legal Support Trusts across England & Wales, provide grant funding to support advice and pro bono agencies that provide free legal help to the public in need. The Foundation was established in 2008 by Advice Services Alliance, Bar Council, ILEX and Law Society pursuant to section 194 of the Legal Services Act

2007. The Act introduced pro bono costs which are awarded to the Foundation. For more information visit www.atjf.org.uk

2. Enquiries may be directed to enquiries@atjf.org.uk or telephone Ruth Daniel on 020 7092 3973.
3. LexisNexis are supporting Access to Justice Foundation, providing pro bono marketing and PR work as part of their RE Cares initiative. For information please contact Melissa Higgs on 0207 400 2689 or email melissa.higgs@lexisnexis.co.uk
4. Following a national grants round in December 2011 the Foundation made just over £60,000 of grants to 9 organisations: AdviceUK, Bar Pro Bono Unit, Citizens Advice, Environmental Law Foundation, ILEX Pro Bono, Law Centres Federation, LawWorks, Personal Support Unit, and RCJ Advice Bureau.
5. The Civil Justice Council is an advisory body chaired by the Master of the Rolls. The report on self-represented litigants can be downloaded at civiljusticecouncil.judiciary.gov.uk