



Dormant funds - time to act

The Access to Justice Foundation (the “Foundation”) is the legal profession’s charity to support pro bono and advice agencies. It was established by the Law Society, Bar Council, Institute of Legal Executives and Advice Services Alliance. The Foundation is independent of Government and partners with a network of seven regional legal support trusts, ensuring funds can be distributed where needed most throughout England and Wales. Using funds raised by lawyers, the Foundation provides grants to pro bono charities, Law Centres, Citizens’ Advice Bureaux and other advice agencies. The aim is to support the provision of free legal assistance to members of the public in poverty but not eligible for legal aid.

All public services are facing an uphill struggle over the next couple of years. Central government and local authority funding for public services will dramatically reduce.

We already know that legal aid for people facing legal problems with housing, benefits, employment or community care may be cut and those who cannot afford to pay for advice are going to find it very difficult to seek free legal help.

Law Centres and similar specialist legal help agencies which traditionally have provided help to those in need for free, will struggle to survive at all without additional charitable help.

The Foundation is asking the legal profession to help to alleviate the problems and avert disaster caused by the proposed cuts by ensuring any monies which remain unclaimed by clients are paid to the Foundation.

The donation of dormant funds can produce a significant resource during this very difficult time. It may appear that transferring a few amounts of less than £50 would make little difference. However there are a very large number of those amounts sitting in client accounts across the country. If most of those are processed and donated to the Foundation it will produce a substantial cumulative amount and we will be able to target the consequent large amounts to where they will do the most good.

Using the Foundation’s in-depth knowledge of the free legal advice sector we target the funds to save the best legal advice providers. We will ensure that they remain viable and develop the most efficient systems and procedures to emerge from the crisis as stronger, if leaner, organisations providing the best possible service to the poorest and most disadvantaged people.