



PRESS RELEASE

Government forced into a U-turn on legal aid for unaccompanied migrant children.

Immigration law is complex and fast moving. Combined with the hostile environment which we have seen wreak such havoc on the Windrush generation, the thought of children navigating the system alone was terrifying. Sometimes as a lawyer you start with a gut instinct that something is wrong, and you build a case around it. After 5 years of hard work it is a relief to see that instinct vindicated.

Roopa Tanna - Solicitor, Islington Law Centre

Islington Law Centre and MiCLU represented The Children's Society in their 5-year long legal challenge to the government's 2013 removal of legal aid for children's immigration cases. In a [Ministerial Statement](#) in the House of Commons on 12 July 2018 Lucy Frazer (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice) announced that changes will now be made to reinstate legal aid as of right for unaccompanied or separated migrant children requiring legal advice and representation in relation to immigration matters. This is the first time that the Lord Chancellor has exercised his powers to reinstate civil legal aid for a specified group.

In the face of the hostile environment and cut to services this is an important safeguard for children who face complex laws affecting every aspect of their lives. Children without a parent to advocate for them are particularly vulnerable, and, as Windrush has shown us, the effects of being unable to assert rights and entitlements in relation to immigration entitlements can last a lifetime.

The role of a Law Centre is to ensure equality of access to justice to all members of our community. In the face of cuts to our services we nevertheless decided to run this case because of the fundamental issues of access to justice involved.

Stuart Hearne – Co-Director, Islington Law Centre

We are immensely proud of our legal team. In particular we would like to thank Paul Bowen QC, Michelle Knorr, Alison Pickup, Oliver Jones, and Zoe Harper. We would also like to thank all those who supported the case by providing evidence of the impact that loss of legal aid has had on separated and unaccompanied migrant children.

At MiCLU our aim is for every migrant child to have their voice heard in legal proceedings affecting them. We are so proud of our legal team for bringing this case so that unaccompanied and separated migrant children have access to a lawyer to help them to be fully involved in issues so key to their future.

Anna Skehan – Solicitor, MiCLU