

# Hamlyn Trust 50th anniversary awards

## Human rights training and support for voluntary and community sector advisers

Report by the Civil Liberties Trust

Two months after Liberty was awarded a grant from the Hamlyn Trust, a new government was elected, committed to incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law. With that came the greatest challenge and opportunity Liberty has faced in its history. Incorporation has also made the project we put forward to the trust for its 50th anniversary award more relevant and timely than ever.

The aim of our project was to provide training and support for those in the voluntary and community sectors who advise other people on matters concerning human rights. It was aimed at members of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and public bodies who advise clients on legal and welfare issues. This includes workers in advice centres, Law Centres, trades unions and voluntary organisations, as well as specialist human rights groups. The courses are also designed for probation officers, social workers and other public sector staff.

For many years, Liberty's legal department has given free advice to voluntary agencies acting on behalf of their clients. Many enquiries concern policing issues, including complaints about police behaviour and disclosure of information. Advice is also frequently sought from staff at centres catering for the needs of young people, ethnic minorities, ex-offenders, drug-users and homeless people.

Much of the advice we give is limited to the circumstances of individual cases and it is often not possible, nor efficient, to provide more detailed information and advice on an individual basis. It was also evident from the enquiries we received that there are frequently encountered problems affecting clients which advisers are often ill-equipped to tackle. We saw training as a more effective means for the wider dissemination of legal advice. Advising advisers can often be a very cost-effective way of giving advice and improving the quality of service to the ultimate user.

It is important that advisers have relevant knowledge of human rights law in their field in order to act on behalf of clients. They may need to inform clients about their basic legal rights or recognise the need for further legal assistance from Liberty, law firms or other organisations. Voluntary and community sector advisers may be the most trusted and accessible source of advice for their client group and can therefore pass on the benefits derived from training more directly and durably.

So far we have concentrated on informing advisers about the implications of incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law. We have carried out the project through a combination of training sessions for non-governmental organisations, Law Society accredited CPD

training courses, and through workshops and talks given to a variety of voluntary organisations at conferences and special events. Over 1,500 people have benefited from the training programme to date.

Following a series of preparatory meetings, we organised a successful training day on protest and public order law which took place on Saturday, 25 October 1997. Thirty people took part, most of whom were from voluntary and community organisations. The need for the event was identified through consultation with the Right to Protest Forum, a grouping of lawyers, organisations and individuals co-ordinated by Earthrights. The trainers were Keir Starmer, barrister at Doughty Street Chambers and Jonathan Cooper, then Legal Director of Liberty.

In November 1997 we organised a seminar on incorporation and the implications of the Human Rights Bill for non-governmental human rights organisations. The seminar was organised in partnership with the Human Rights Coalition, whose members include Justice, IPPR, the 1990 Trust, King's College Incorporation Project and Charter 88. In the same month, we ran a successful training course for Black and other ethnic minority organisations on incorporation. Thirty people took part in the event which was organised jointly with the 1990 Trust. Subsequently in July 1998, Liberty's legal officer, Di Luping, led a similar workshop at a 1990 Trust event held in Leeds.

Our 1998 conference, *The Human Rights Act 1998*, provided an opportunity for detailed discussion by more than 200 delegates, of the implications of incorporation across a wide range of issues. Privacy was the focus of two sessions, one on technology and surveillance, and the other on striking the balance between privacy and freedom of expression in the media. There were also sessions on women's rights, race issues, lesbian and gay equality and intelligence-led policing. The conference was also distinctive in highlighting the implications of incorporation for public authorities. Speakers included Lord Williams of Mostyn QC, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs, His Honour Judge Paul Collins, Director of Studies for the Judicial Studies Board and Peter Neyroud, Assistant Chief Constable of the West Mercia Police. The conference was a great success and we received very positive feedback from participants who found it useful, timely and stimulating.

We have continued to develop our CPD training programme for lawyers. A significant minority of course participants are lawyers, and occasionally non-lawyers, from voluntary organisations. The support of the Hamlyn Trust has assisted us in offering discounted course fees to voluntary sector

employees. Most of our recent courses have examined the role that the European Convention can play in specialist areas of law, such as prisoners' rights, public order, immigration, media law, employment and criminal law.

One of the most effective and efficient ways for Liberty to inform professionals about the implications of human rights law in their area of practice is to address members at their own meetings and events. In September 1997, Liberty's Director, John Wadham, led a workshop on incorporation at the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux annual conference and also addressed the annual conference of HIV/AIDS organisations; in July 1998, he spoke on incorporation to over 600 delegates at Victim Support's Annual Conference. During the project, Liberty has also organised or contributed to a variety of in-house training programmes. For instance, in December 1997, we led a workshop for people involved in the criminal justice system, mainly probation officers, at an event organised by the Romily Association in Reading.

This autumn, we are launching a series of short courses, which build directly on the initiatives described above, for non-governmental organisations on the implications of incorporation

in their specific field of work. For example, there will be sessions on public order and protest, freedom of expression, criminal justice, policing and prisoners' rights, as well as on asylum and immigration, disability and children's rights. The programme includes training days, specifically aimed at advice workers, on the rights protected under the convention and the relevant mechanisms for redress.

The project has enabled Liberty to achieve much, devising and delivering training for voluntary sector advice workers in different areas of work and across different parts of the country. Our intention now is to organise a more extensive, nationwide programme of training, building what we hope will be a sustainable network of training, advice and exchange at all levels between Liberty, other specialist NGOs, lawyers and voluntary and community organisations.

#### FURTHER DETAILS

For further information about this project, please contact Mr Jonathan Hardy, Development Officer, Liberty, 21 Tabard St., London SE1 4LA (Tel: 0171 403 3888)

## 'Hamlyn Trust Scholarships' for community legal education and training

Report by the Legal Services Agency, Glasgow

The Legal Services Agency (LSA), Scotland's National Law Centre, is a charity and public service organisation which advertises its services throughout Scotland. Its objectives are to assist all disadvantaged persons in Scotland by undertaking casework to a high volume and quality, by conducting legal research and by providing legal education and training. Membership is open to any tenants' group, community organisation or charitable organisation located in Scotland, and all members are entitled to nominate candidates to the Board of Directors and to vote at the annual general meeting. In short, the agency is an independent 'user-controlled' community law centre, currently serving approximately 400 voluntary, charitable and community groups throughout Scotland. The agency has offices in Glasgow and Edinburgh, with a combined staff of 19.

The grant of £5,000 from the Hamlyn Trust was designed to support the agency's work in providing 'community legal education' throughout Scotland. LSA is Scotland's leading community legal training and education organisation. Since its inception, now nearly 10 years ago, over 25,000 delegates have benefited from LSA's work. LSA can claim through its work to have developed a number of key areas of social welfare law in a fashion that has been to a high standard, but at a pretty low cost.

As a law centre employing nine solicitors, LSA is aware of the need to develop new remedies in the areas of mental health law, social security, employment, anti-discrimination, housing, rights of victims of violence, to name but a few. In spite of the low costs of LSA's seminars (generally around half the cost of relevant competitors) LSA is aware that many community organisations, charities and advice agencies, particularly outwith the 'Central Belt' of Scotland, are unable to afford to come to many of our events. In order to encourage involvement LSA

employed the grant from the Hamlyn Trust to provide 'Hamlyn Trust Scholarships' designed to make it more financially viable for a wider range of delegates to attend LSA training or education events. The Scholarships were particularly aimed at individuals who could pass on their knowledge to others by way of information or skills 'cascade'.

The launch event for the scholarships was LSA's bi-annual Social Welfare Law two or three day conference. This took place in the autumn of 1997 and the 'take-up' of scholarship applications was so high that over £2,000 of the grant was put to use in relation to this one event alone. But the availability of this financial assistance meant that there was a much wider range of delegates than would otherwise have been the case.

Other events which were particularly popular include LSA's *Employment Law* course (where 20% of the delegates received concessionary places supported by the Hamlyn Trust) and a major conference on *Criminal Injuries Compensation and Defending Evictions*.

It is not normally financially viable for LSA's staff to travel elsewhere to give training events; but the assistance of the Trust meant that a number of training events have taken place elsewhere, most recently for instance in Kilwinning and, in the autumn of this year, a conference on *Elderly Care and the Law* will take place in Ayr.

Overall the experiment has shown that there is a demand for high quality training events which quite small organisations are prepared to attend if the price can be made acceptable. LSA now proposes to build on this successful experiment by taking up the particular challenge posed by the massive changes in employment law and social welfare law which seem likely to follow 'domestication' of the European Convention on Human Rights.