

## LAW CENTRE TO TAKE PART IN NATIONAL PROJECT

Coventry Law Centre has been selected to participate in a national Disability Rights Project in partnership with the Disability Rights Commission (DRC). The aim is to increase the profile for disability rights issues both nationally and locally, by funding Disability Rights Workers in Law Centres and other agencies across the country.

The project will run for 22 months, until 1st October 2007, when the DRC merges into the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

The Law Centre will work to raise awareness of disability rights both in Coventry and across the West Midlands region, including Warwickshire, and will undertake casework in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act.

Tim Astley has been appointed to undertake this work. He has experience in undertaking this type of specialised casework from previous jobs. Tim said 'I am very pleased to have been given the opportunity to work on this project. I will be making contact with organisations in the area who work with disabled people, but if any organisation wants to contact me I would be pleased to hear from them. Any individual disabled people who may have discrimination cases can also contact me at the Law Centre on 024 7622 3053.'



## A NEW WAY TO KEEP IN TOUCH

Many of you will have visited the Law Centre website at [www.covlaw.org.uk](http://www.covlaw.org.uk). If you haven't, please do – it has lots of information about the organisation, but, more importantly, lots of useful leaflets covering all the areas of work that we do. These can be downloaded and printed off to provide help and support with all kinds of problems.

Now we are launching a new service from our website – a news feed.

### What is a news feed?

A news feed allows you to subscribe to news from a website, so that whenever the site is updated, the new content is delivered straight to your computer. With news feeds you do not have to keep checking the websites you are interested in to see if new content has been added. The new content comes to you. News feeds, or RSS feeds, to use a more technical term, allow you to keep up to date with all the sites and information you might be interested in.

So, if you like receiving news via your computer, go to our website to find out how you can sign up to the Law Centre news feed. That way, you will always know when there is a change in the law or any of the regulations surrounding the areas of law that we specialise in, as well as keeping up to date with what we're doing.

## GETTING RESULTS

The Law Centre has been successful in securing funding under the Commission for Racial Equality's 'Getting Results' programme. Over the next year we will use this funding to raise awareness of race discrimination, and to take on casework for people who have suffered such discrimination.

The Law Centre has always given priority to employment cases where discrimination is a factor, and over 30% of our cases last year had a discrimination element. This funding will allow us to raise awareness of discrimination in the provision of goods and services, and also particularly to focus on discrimination in relation to immigration cases.

We will be working with Coventry Partnership's Equalities and Communities Theme Group, and, within the next few weeks, we will hold a launch seminar. This will be followed by an advertising campaign on the city's buses, and the offer of training to other organisations in the city, as well as the production of posters, leaflets and discrimination advice surgeries around the city.

We are also operating a new Discrimination advice line staffed by one of our specialist discrimination workers. It is on Wednesdays between 4 p.m and 5.30 p.m. The telephone number is 024 7625 3169.

# ON THE RADIO ... AND OUT ON THE TOWN

The Housing Team at the Law Centre has been trying new ways to reach people who may be having problems paying their rent, before it gets to the stage where their landlord is seeking an eviction.

Although the team runs a scheme at the County Court to represent tenants at eviction hearings and this has helped many people keep their home, Gay Burridge, Housing Team Supervisor says "We want to catch these problems at an earlier stage. Although we can help at court, by the time it gets to that stage people often owe a lot of money. The problem has become much bigger, and the whole experience is very traumatic for people."

The team has been working in partnership with Whitefriars Housing (Coventry's biggest social landlord) to offer independent advice to their tenants before any court hearing takes place. This is working well and they have been able to help many tenants, as well as playing a part in the overall success recently publicised by Whitefriars in reducing their arrears. "Many tenants have not received all the housing benefit to which they are entitled, and this is not spotted until they are seen by a member of the team"

explains Gay. An immediate reduction in the debt is the first step to solving the problem.

"However, there is still a group who we are not reaching – young people. They do not respond to letters from their landlord, and many do not turn up to the Court hearing. They lose their home, and end up often owing large sums of money which prevent them from getting another tenancy in the future."

The Law Centre has teamed up with HILLZ Radio, a community radio station, based in Hillfields and broadcasting on FM 102.6. The station works with young people and their broadcasts are aimed at young people in the city. 25,000 people tune in. The station is playing an ad every hour aimed at young people who might have rent problems and urging them to contact the Law Centre.

"In addition", says Gay, "we are also putting posters and leaflets in clubs and pubs in the city, and running a campaign on the back of toilet doors in these places, to make young people aware that we can help them. If young people come to us with their tenancy problems there will almost always be something that we can do

## IT'S OUR BIRTHDAY!

The Law Centre is celebrating its 30th year this year. We began as Coventry Legal and Income Rights Service in 1976, and became Coventry Law Centre in 2001.

In that time, we have helped hundreds of thousands of people in the city, and represented at thousands of tribunals and court cases.

Every year since 1976, we have been funded by Coventry City Council. That has been a fantastic commitment, and it is that continued support which has enabled us to help so many and to develop to offer the range of advice and help which we do today.

We will be promoting our services to help us to reach more people all through this year, and, later in the year, we will be holding a celebration party. It will be an event not to be missed, so watch for your invitation!



## Congratulations to Robert Taylor



Congratulations to Robert Taylor on qualifying as a solicitor

We are very pleased to be able to congratulate Robert Taylor on qualifying as a Solicitor. Robert is a member of our Welfare Rights team. He has worked at the Law Centre

since February 2004 and already had substantial experience in welfare rights law, including representation at benefit tribunals. During his training, he has also gained experience in immigration and employment law.

Many private sector solicitors are moving away from Legal Aid work and it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit qualified solicitors with experience in social welfare law.

Coventry Law Centre has therefore decided to invest in the future by training new solicitors in social welfare law. As a large Law Centre, offering advice in six areas of social welfare law, we are well placed to offer a broad range of experience during the training contract, and to be able to offer post-qualification employment.

Robert's training was supported by a grant from the Legal Services Commission, and we hope to be able to continue this programme into the future.