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Six law firms and 22 barristers launch Cardiff Court Family Free Advice Clinic



LEGAL NEWS | 7 October 2015

'Overwhelming demand' for family law advice and rise of litigants in person leads to opening of new pro bono initiative backed by local judges

A new legal advice clinic has been launched to advise people involved in family proceedings who do not have the means to pay for legal representation.



Cardiff law firms, in partnership with LawWorks Cymru, local barristers, and other stakeholders, have set up the pro bono clinic in response to 'overwhelming demand', following the removal of legal aid for most private family law cases.

Spearheaded by Her Honour Judge Isabel Parry and District Judge David Crowley, the Cardiff Court Family Free Advice Clinic will operate from the county court, and has been developed in response to evidenced need from the [Personal Support Unit](#) (PSU) and judges who have seen an increase in unrepresented individuals involved with family court proceedings.

Judge Parry remarked: 'On behalf of the judges at the Cardiff Family Court, I am delighted that there is going to be some legal advice available at court to litigants who are not represented. The judges are very conscious that coming to court is a new and difficult experience for parents and family members who are in dispute with each other about the children they love.'

'This is a very small step on a long journey to make legal advice more available and accessible to litigants but we have to start somewhere. The judges are grateful to all who are giving up their professional time to help with this project and hope that this small step will encourage more practitioners to get involved.'

PSU supports approximately 250 litigants a month in the Civil Justice Centre and has seen a significant rise in the number of people seeking support, with 60 per cent of clients requiring support for family law related matters.

LawWorks Cymru and PSU are supporting the clinic as part of the litigants in person support strategy announced by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in autumn 2014.

Mabel Thompson, the coordinator at PSU Cardiff commented: 'The new family pro bono clinic will provide access to legal advice in often critical and desperate times to vulnerable people across Wales. It will be great to know we can direct suitable clients to the clinic. This service will ensure litigants gain additional access to justice through the support of lawyers.'

LawWorks's chief executive Martin Barnes said the clinic was an important and much needed service, and a 'testament to local collaboration, commitment and partnership working'.

The clinic is a broad collaboration bringing together six law firms - Alun Jones Family Law, Colin Jones Clarke and Hartland, Duncan Lewis, Huttons, Spicketts Battrick, and Thomas Simon Solicitors - 22 barristers, a pro bono mediation service, two local universities, and HMCTS.

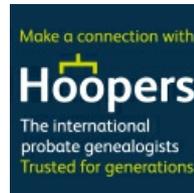
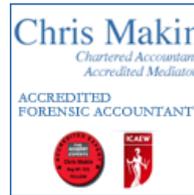
Commenting on the clinic's launch, director at Duncan Lewis Heather Iqbal Rayner said: 'The new family pro bono clinic is designed to give those who are vulnerable and struggling to deal with family law proceedings access to lawyers. This is an invaluable service which is welcomed by the judiciary.'

Susan Williams, director at Thomas Simon, observed: 'Those who need legal advice the most are often those who cannot afford to pay legal fees. They are frequently the most vulnerable members of society. This pro bono legal service allows the local legal community to give back to those who need the service most.'

Spicketts Battrick's head of family Law and care, Linda Parish, added: 'It has been pleasing to see such a large number of respected family lawyers and firms working together to give the public a service at court to assist the public at a stressful time.'

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The clinic will provide initial legal advice, information, and advocacy and will run between 9.30am and 1.30pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which are family hearing days.



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