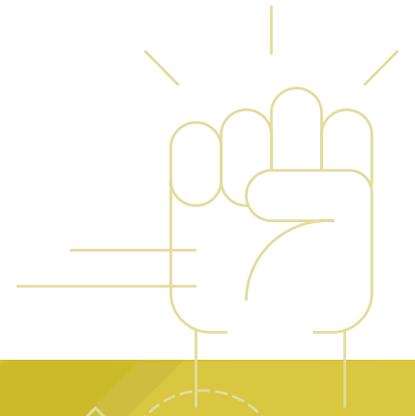


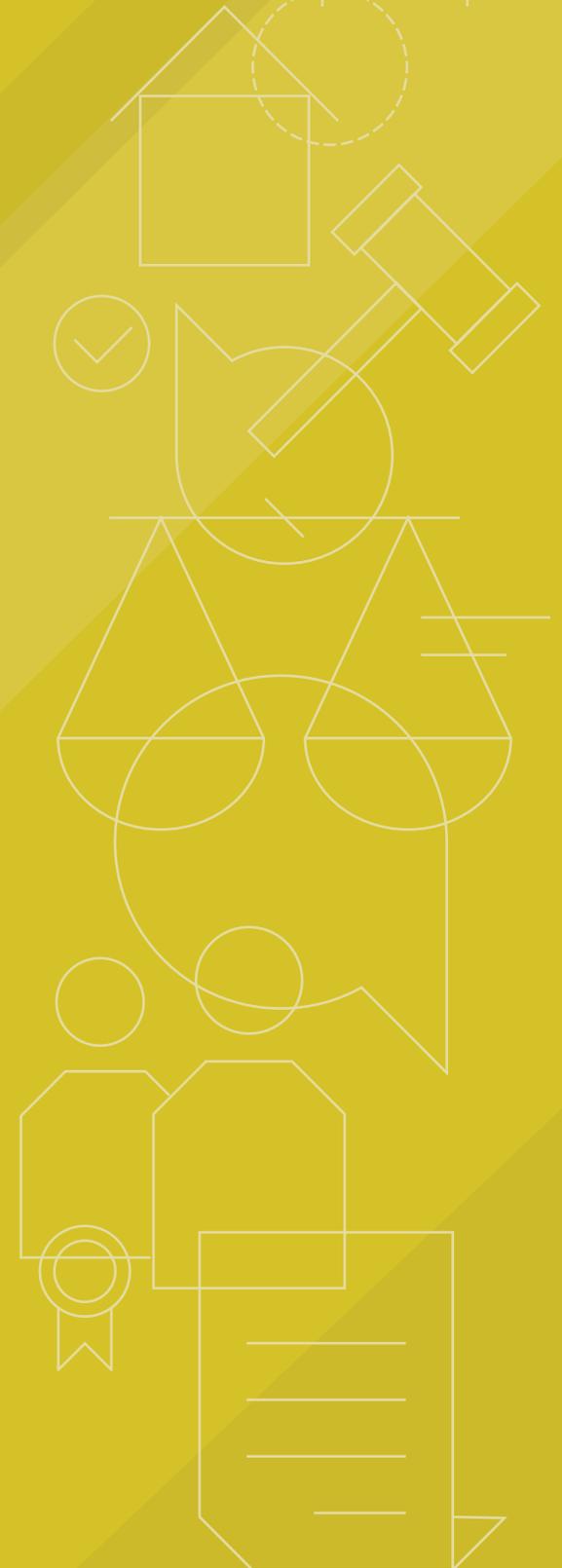


**Community
Law & Mediation**



STRATEGIC PLAN

**2019
– 2023**



VISION

To make our communities more just and inclusive by facilitating access to legal services for all.

MISSION

To provide people in our communities with expert legal, mediation and education services they would not otherwise have access to and in doing so, to address underlying issues of injustice and exclusion while working for real change.

VALUES



Empowerment. We empower people to actively participate in society.



Impact. We ensure our work has positive impact on the communities and clients we serve.



Accessibility. Our services are accessible by all those who need them.



Community Engagement. Our services are driven by, and reflect, the needs of the community.



Partnership. We work in partnership and collaboration with others to achieve our strategic objectives.



Innovation. We believe that having the attitude and environment to adapt and innovate is core to our success.



Good Governance. We practice good governance and guarantee transparency and accountability in our systems and practices.



Expertise. We are proud of our professionalism and commitment to quality in everything we do.

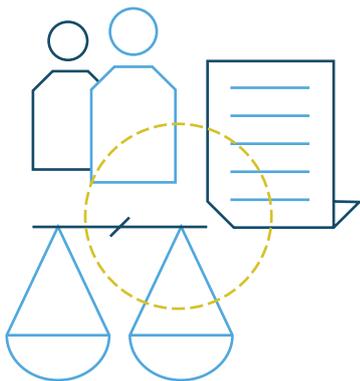
INTRODUCTION

Set up in 1975 as a prototype law centre and campaign tool in the movement for civil legal aid, Community Law and Mediation (CLM) has been a pioneering organisation in the provision of community based legal and mediation services.

With the establishment of a second law centre in Limerick in 2012, the community CLM serves has grown beyond the original catchment area of Coolock and includes anyone who, because of economic, social or other disadvantage, is unable to access the services CLM provides. Due to resource constraints, certain services will continue to have a local catchment area and these include legal advice clinics and mediation.

CLM works to empower individuals experiencing disadvantage through three strands of service provision. These are:

- information and education;
- legal advice and representation; and
- mediation and conflict coaching.



16,403

people and/or legal issues were assisted and dealt with through CLM's services between 2013 and 2017.

CLM also seeks to have a wider impact through law reform work and by providing legal advice and training to other advocacy organisations on issues affecting their service users.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

To meet the unmet legal needs of, and to empower, the community through the provision of legal, mediation & education services.

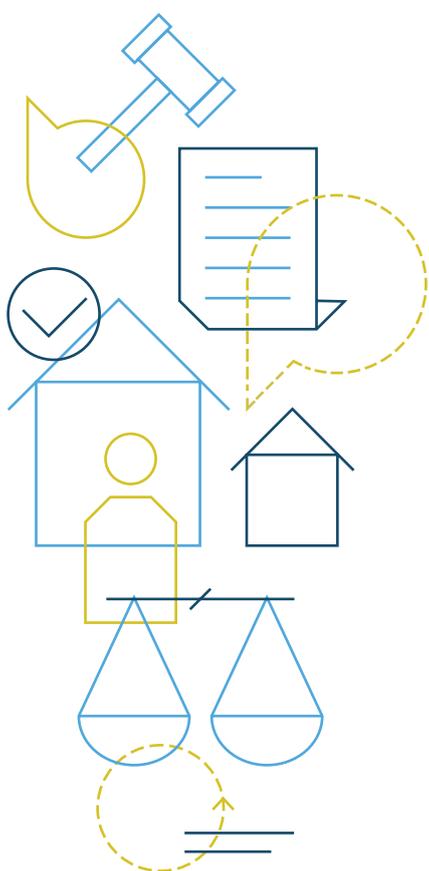
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

To address legal issues arising in our services through political and legal processes.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

To ensure that CLM has the people, systems, structures and resources to deliver on our strategic objectives.

As an integral part of its operation, CLM continuously assesses areas of legal need in the community and determines how best to respond to that need. For example, in the last five years, we have worked in the area of **housing and homelessness** in the following ways:



Published a user friendly homelessness information guide.

Gave free community talks on housing rights.

Delivered 16 legal advice clinics per month including 3 outreach clinics specialising in housing and homelessness.

Published a social housing guide for advocates.

Provided legal advocacy and representation in 237 housing cases.

Appeared before the Emergency Dail Committee on Housing and Homelessness.

Completed several law reform submissions and roundtables in the area of housing and homelessness.

Entered into a legal support contract with MABS providing housing advice to money advisors.

Provided training for housing advocates including an online course with UL on Housing Law & Policy.

Gave community talks on using mediation to resolve disputes which contribute to homelessness.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

To meet the unmet legal needs of, and to empower, the community through the provision of legal, mediation & education services.

- 1.1 CLM will, through its work with members and other stakeholders, and the use of data from its case management system, identify areas of unmet legal need and determine how best to meet that need.**
- 1.2 We will collaborate with relevant organisations to meet the unmet legal needs of the community.**
- 1.3 We will increase CLM's second tier advice work through membership as well as legal support contracts with, and the provision of training to, advocacy organisations.**

- 1.4 We will provide information and education on legal rights & processes and mediation awareness & dispute resolution skills.**
- 1.5 We will provide an accessible legal advice, advocacy and representation service in the areas of unmet legal need.**
- 1.6 We will maintain our current mediation and conflict coaching service.**
- 1.7 We will ensure that growth in service provision respects the principle of community engagement.**

WHY & HOW

The right of access to justice is a constitutional principle and a right under the European Convention on Human Rights. Nonetheless, significant difficulties remain for a large cohort of the population in accessing the courts or accessing legal advice.

While many organisations provide information, advice and advocacy, very few provide free legal advice and representation. The community consultation report prepared during the establishment of CLM Limerick in 2012 showed that community organisations rated the availability of legal services to their clients as 'not good' or 'bad' and they acknowledged their own limited expertise in the area.

The current system of civil legal aid in Ireland, through the Legal Aid Board, is largely confined to legal advice and representation. While legal advice is provided in most areas of law, legal representation is limited and the majority of cases are confined to the area of family law. Other areas of law, such as appeals before the Social

Welfare Appeals Office, and employment and equality cases before the Workplace Relations Commission, are excluded from its remit. These limitations place significant barriers on the right of access to justice.

In the lifetime of this Plan, CLM will strive to continuously identify areas of unmet legal need in the community. Such need may be in relation to specific areas (such as housing law) or specific groups (such as members of the Traveller community). We will determine how best to meet that need in a sustainable way, through collaboration with, and support for, other organisations. We have experience of this through the provision of 'Know your Rights' talks, outreach legal advice clinics, and support to other advocacy organisations through our membership scheme, legal support contracts and training. This collaborative approach broadens the ambit of our work while working within the structure of a community network.

CLM will continue to operate with our model, which is a combination of both the strategic and service models of Law Centre. The strength of this is the ability to tackle the same issue from many angles: information, education, legal advice and representation, mediation, law reform, and support for other advocacy organisations. This is vital where, for example, a legal case, on its own, might only resolve the issue for the individual litigant but does not address the underlying problem.

CLM will continue to deliver our education service, for example, through our work with the 'Legal Eagles' project and the provision of information and talks to the community in areas of identified need. We will continue to provide our mediation and conflict coaching service and will also provide training to both individuals and front line services in dispute resolution skills, which are vital to preventing poor decision making and entrenchment of conflict. Casebase is currently the only publicly accessible database of social welfare appeals decisions. We will continue to develop, expand and promote this resource.

CLM will continue to provide an accessible service through our outreach and after hours legal advice clinics, which are delivered in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere using jargon free language. We will focus our advocacy and representation work on the areas of greatest need, which disproportionately affect those living in disadvantage, and which are not catered for by the Legal Aid Board. These include housing, education, health, employment, equality, social welfare and debt.

In any future growth and development of the organisation, our core value of community engagement will be respected so as to guarantee the continued relationship between the needs of the community and the services we offer.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

To address legal issues arising in our services through political and legal processes.

- 2.1 CLM will continue to take strategic litigation cases.**
- 2.2 We will review the process and identify at least one key area each year in relation to legal policy work, informed by trends emerging in our services.**
- 2.3 We will invest in communications and develop a communication and political engagement strategy.**

WHY & HOW

Part of CLM's model is to tackle issues emerging in our legal service through our law reform work. While sometimes the law reform issue relates to a gap or injustice in the law, it can also relate to a

failure to observe due process, fair procedures or the rights and protections already enshrined in law.

Connecting our service and law reform work ensures we are addressing the issues of greatest relevance to the community, in a way which has maximum positive impact. In identifying areas for reform, we are cognisant of the need to focus our law reform work on our areas of expertise and of the need, at times, to partner with other organisations to draw on their skills and experience to achieve optimum results.

CLM's law reform work may take the form of a strategic litigation case, a legal policy submission, engagement with State bodies and other duty bearers, or a combination of all three.

In developing a strategic litigation policy, we recognise that strategic cases cannot be identified in a vacuum and strategic issues often only emerge as a case progresses. This more open approach to casework must be balanced against available organisational and staff resources and the need to ensure that other areas of work such as law reform and education are not adversely impacted.

While strategic litigation can be effective in achieving change for the individual litigant and sometimes in relation to the law itself, it is more effective if it is supported by a communications strategy to influence decision makers. In the absence of a class action system in Ireland, engagement with the political system is critical in guaranteeing the realisation of rights assured by the judicial system; ensuring that the effects of a positive case result are not reversed by the political system; and representing the needs of the group of which the individual client is a representative.

In the lifetime of this Strategic Plan, we will develop a communications strategy to support engagement with political and other stakeholders following a court decision or legal policy submission.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

To ensure that CLM has the people, systems, structures and resources to deliver on our strategic objectives.

- 3.1 We will ensure that CLM has a high quality and supported team of staff and volunteers with the appropriate skills to deliver on CLM's strategic objectives.**
- 3.2 We guarantee that CLM is governed to a high professional standard, ensuring transparent and accountable systems for all our stakeholders.**
- 3.3 We will operate a funding model that provides continuity of resources through diverse and reliable funding streams and which promotes organisational resilience.**
- 3.4 We will develop tools to evaluate work, monitor compliance with the Strategic Plan and measure impact.**

WHY & HOW

In order to deliver on the strategic objectives of the Plan, CLM will secure its financial sustainability by developing a funding strategy that seeks to maintain current funding and identify new, diverse funding sources. We will ensure that risks posed by any changes to our core funding are minimised. We will continue to build on our reserves in line with good governance arrangements and best practice so that the organisation can withstand financial emergencies and unforeseen liabilities.

CLM will ensure that it has sufficient, high calibre staff and volunteers who feel engaged, valued and supported and who are committed to delivering on the organisation's strategic objectives.

In the current challenging operating environment, CLM will ensure that it maintains the highest standards of governance and will maintain a balanced and engaged board.

We in CLM will constantly challenge ourselves to do better, increase our effectiveness, and expand our impact on the community we serve. CLM will develop the tools to evaluate our work and measure its impact. CLM will also ensure it has appropriate systems in place to monitor the implementation of this Strategic Plan.

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