

Extra support for thousands navigating the legal system

- increased £4 million funding to help vulnerable people in civil and family legal disputes
- focus on early intervention to resolve issues before going to court
- follows proposals that see extra 2 million people eligible for legal aid

Around £4 million will be awarded to charities and organisations providing legal help this financial year – an increase on the £3 million provided in previous years.

The grants will help ensure people can get speedy support to understand how to deal with the legal problems they face.

For people who do go on to represent themselves in civil and family cases, the support will focus on resolving their legal problems at an earlier stage with access to specialist legal guidance in person, by telephone or online, to deal with the problem before it escalates.

Grants will also fund services to help people through the court process, including online guides and in person support on the day of their appearance.

It follows the government's proposals for two million more people to have access to legal aid following changes to the means test. Both income and capital thresholds will be raised, while disputed assets will not count towards an applicant's threshold, benefitting victims of domestic abuse.

Justice Minister Lord Bellamy QC said:

This funding and our wider legal aid reforms will ensure that those who encounter a legal problem will have someone to turn to, regardless of their financial circumstances.

It will help more people resolve issues quickly, away from court, saving them the money and the stress that can be caused.

The Ministry of Justice has provided £21 million to organisations providing legal support for litigants in person since 2015 and research shows that this kind of support helps almost two-thirds of people resolve their problems without going to court.

The department is partnering with the Access to Justice Foundation (ATJF), who will administer the funding, with expressions of interest open to organisations from today.

Joint Chief Executive Officer of the ATJF Clare Carter said:

We're delighted to be working with Ministry of Justice on the new Help Accessing Legal Support grant. The Access to Justice Foundation exists to support organisations helping people most in need address their social welfare legal issues.

This grant will help a wide range of legal support and advice organisations across England and Wales help people resolve their legal issues at the earliest opportunity.

What this means in practice is that more people will be able to get advice online, on the phone or in person which helps them better understand and resolve their housing, benefits, debt, employment or family issues. In this way, more people will be able to access support at an early stage in the process, before things escalate. We will also be looking to support services which exist to assist people through the court process.

The types of frontline organisations that have benefited from government funding for legal support in the past include an independent advice agency in East London supporting individuals with the required documentation and forms, as well as tribunal and court representation on welfare, housing and debt issues.

Notes to editors

- The Legal Support for Litigants in Person Grant (LSLIP) [interim report](#) has provided solid evidence that providing legal support services helps people to resolve their issue without it progressing to court: 62% of clients resolved their problems with the support of generalised advice, casework and early specialist legal assistance, avoiding the need to go to court.
- You can apply for grants here: [Our Grants – The Access To Justice Foundation \(atjf.org.uk\)](#)
- An example of a person supported through an organisation funded through the AJTF includes Jane (not her real name) from Devon a young mother with two small children and domestic abuse victim living with PTSD and depression.
 - Jane stopped contact between the children and their father over safeguarding concerns including neglect and emotional abuse (continuously shouting and swearing at the children). The father retaliated by filing a Child Arrangements Order application to resume contact.
 - Jane's mental health problems and vulnerability meant she struggled to respond by herself, especially considering that the required paperwork and documents dealt with a very difficult and troubling time in her life where she was constantly abused and subject to coercive control. Her local free legal advice charity, an Access to Justice Foundation grantee, drafted these documents for her so that she could comply with the court's directions and represent her arguments and concerns effectively.