



**Mercy Law**  
Resource Centre  
2009 – 2019

**10**  
**YEARS**  
of Mercy Law

## AN OVERVIEW OF OUR WORK

### WELCOME FROM REBECCA KEATINGE, MANAGING SOLICITOR



This year MLRC marks ten years in operation. The demand for MLRC's services has grown beyond what our founders could have ever anticipated.

In the decade since our establishment, MLRC has positively impacted the lives of thousands of individuals and families in homelessness or at risk of homelessness. A sincere thank you to all our dedicated staff, volunteers, funders, corporate partners and stakeholders for supporting our work over the past ten years; we could not have had this impact without your generosity and solidarity. I hope you enjoy this overview of the impact of MLRC work over the last ten years.

## OUR VISION

Mercy Law Resource Centre's vision is of a society where each individual lives in **dignity** and enjoys **equal rights**, in particular the right to a **home**, which is fundamental to each human being. MLRC's vision is also of a society where every individual enjoys **equal access to justice** and legal recourse in order to **vindicate those rights**.

## WHO WE ARE

Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) is an independent law centre, registered charity and company limited by guarantee which provides free legal advice and representation to people who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, in the areas of social housing and related social welfare law.

## WHAT WE DO

MLRC provides free legal advice and representation to homeless individuals, and alongside legal casework, also seeks to advocate for changes in laws, policies and attitudes which adversely impact our client group. We do this through the provision of five key services:



**Free Legal Advice**



**Free Legal Representation**



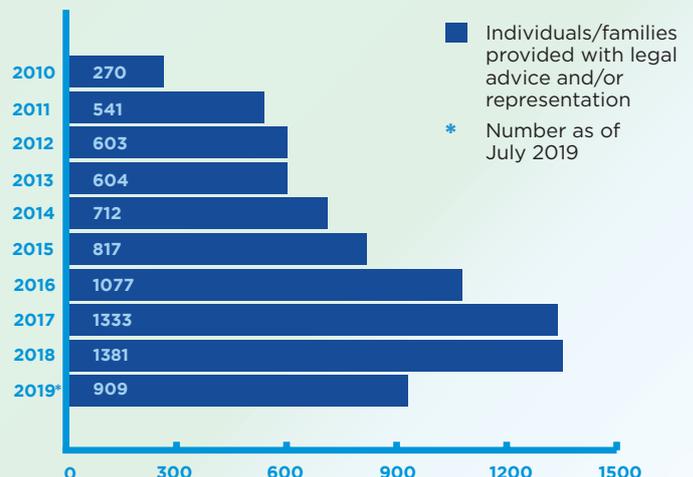
**Training and Legal Support**



**Policy Work**



**Befriending**





# FREE LEGAL ADVICE AND REPRESENTATION

Since establishment in 2009, MLRC has developed a network of legal advice outreach clinics and linked with hundreds of organisations, to support their work with clients affected by homelessness.

Over the last ten years, MLRC has developed and operated regular legal outreach clinics at accessible locations, including homeless hostels; Haven House and Back Lane Night Shelter; at advice centres Crosscare Advocacy Service, Focus Ireland Coffee Shop and Liberties Citizens Information; and at Saoirse Women’s Refuge. In September 2019, we will open a new clinic hosted by Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service specifically to meet the needs of the Traveller community.

Families and ethnic minorities, including members of the Traveller Community are the fastest growing demographic of MLRC client base.

In 2018, **88%** of new clients to MLRC presented with issues in relation to homelessness. Homeless families are disproportionately represented and in 2018, MLRC engaged with **452 families**.

Since 2009, MLRC has provided free legal advice and representation to **8,335** individuals and families.

MLRC currently has **33 open files** and represents a high number of homeless families and highly vulnerable individuals.

# SNAPSHOT OF MLRC CASEWORK AND LITIGATION

Over the last ten years, MLRC has pursued successful litigation through the Courts to vindicate our clients’ rights. These cases include:



Securing stable accommodation through High Court proceedings for a victim of serious domestic violence who was refused access to the housing list on the basis that she did not make a joint application with her abusive spouse.



Overcoming a finding of ‘intentional homelessness’ against our client and securing her and her five children access to stable emergency accommodation.



Successfully advocating for and securing a housing transfer for a vulnerable family experiencing racially motivated anti-social behaviour.



Bringing several successful High Court challenges to unlawful refusals of social housing applications made by EU nationals and non-Irish nationals.



Challenging refusals of emergency homeless accommodation to vulnerable families, ensuring they did not have to sleep in parks, cars & Garda stations.



Acting in High Court cases determined favourably and setting important precedents in relation to treatment of social housing applications, in particular see *Kinsella v Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council* 2012 IEHC 344 & *Zatreanu & Ors v Dublin City Council* 2013 IEHC 556.



Represented a client up to Supreme Court level, lifting an unlawful block on his access to social welfare.



## FIGHTING CLIENT'S CORNER ALL THE WAY



### DON'S STORY:

Don first contacted MLRC in 2011 when he was refused access to the social housing list. MLRC argued that he was being discriminated against and engaged with the local authority to put his case forward. Initially, the local authority, did not respond favourably, but after MLRC progressed the case towards litigation, the local authority reversed their decision and put Don on the social housing list. Don returned to MLRC in 2018 when he was refused medical priority on four occasions. This refusal was despite evidence of his serious and debilitating medical condition being negatively impacted by his overcrowded and inappropriate housing. MLRC submitted a successful appeal of that refusal on behalf of Don, and he went from number 235 on the housing list to number 8. We hope that Don will be housed very soon and continue to advocate on his behalf.

*If I hadn't met with Mercy Law, there's a chance I wouldn't even be on the housing list. I'm now at the stage where I'm number eight, and I couldn't argue with the fact that it's down to Mercy Law, it's totally down to them. I wouldn't have gotten this far, but from the beginning, Mercy Law reassured me that I couldn't be refused, and have been fighting my corner all the way. From the moment I came in here I have been supported."*



### ADEOLA'S STORY:

Adeola contacted MLRC's offices in crisis. She had recently given birth to a baby boy, who arrived four weeks early; she also had a fifteen month old baby boy. When she left the maternity hospital, all the local authority would provide her with was emergency accommodation on a one night only basis. She had to move every day with her infant baby and toddler. Within a day of our engagement, Adeola was provided with stable accommodation. Adeola remains in emergency accommodation with her young family and we continue to support her and her family.

*"When I was on the one night only emergency accommodation, I felt like it was the end, that I would not manage. But Rebecca gave me hope. I felt like I was Rebecca's only client. There is nothing that Mercy Law could have done better. They did everything they could for me."*

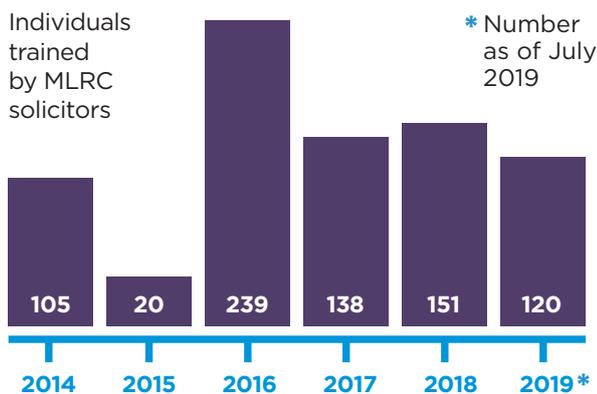




# TRAINING AND LEGAL SUPPORT

MLRC has provided legal support and formal training to hundreds of organisations nationwide since its establishment.

Since 2009, MLRC has trained **809** frontline advocacy and support workers on housing law and social welfare law. **678** were trained on the legal framework in relation to housing and homelessness. **95** were trained on social welfare law.



Through our training, MLRC supports the work of organisations that operate nationwide, including for example, Focus Ireland, Depaul, Merchants Quay Ireland, Traveller groups, HSE staff and staff of Citizens Information Centres.



**MLRC IS SINCERELY GRATEFUL TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS AND FUNDERS WHO HAVE ENABLED MLRC TO ACHIEVE SO MUCH FOR OUR CLIENTS OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS.**

# POLICY WORK

Since 2009, MLRC has made over **27** **POLICY SUBMISSIONS** including most recently on issues affecting homeless families in emergency accommodation. In 2018, MLRC solicitor David Joyce was appointed Chair of the **TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION EXPERT GROUP**.

MLRC has **PUBLISHED** a trilogy of reports on the Right to Housing:



The Right to Housing in Ireland



The Right to Housing in Comparative Perspective



Children and Homelessness – A Gap in Legal Protection

MLRC has presented to **OIREACTHAS COMMITTEES** including on the needs of homeless children and families and on Constitutional protection of the right to housing. MLRC has also presented to the United Nations **UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW** on the right to adequate housing.

# BEFRIENDING

Befriending is a service offering one-to-one non legal practical and emotional support by trained volunteer befrienders to some of MLRC's most vulnerable clients. In a befriender's words:

*“MLRC has provided guidance to me as a befriender when needed and they are doing a much needed job for which there is a real need. An hour a week can make a tremendous difference to someone's life.”*

