



The Access to Justice
Foundation

Impact Report 2025



1. Introduction from our Interim Chair, Andrew Seager

It has been a privilege to oversee a significant year for the Access to Justice Foundation at a time when the need for long term funding for free legal advice across the UK has never been higher.

Every year, 66% of adults in England and Wales face a legal problem but for over 11 million people, help never arrives. Demand for free legal advice, which plays a vital role in helping individuals understand and enforce their rights, has risen by **more than 40%** in five years. Funding from public and philanthropic sources has steadily declined for decades.

Unresolved legal problems drive financial insecurity, mental health deterioration, and rising reliance on emergency services, health and social care. The demand for frontline advice providers, which are uniquely placed to address issues early, has never been greater.

In response to what frontline agencies tell us they need, we are making more long-term unrestricted grants. **In 2025 we had nearly £45 million worth of active grants in place, our highest ever total providing valuable funding to 119 organisations.** I am proud of the position of trust we have in the sector and that over 90% of our funds raised are distributed to the frontline every year.

On the fundraising side we saw progress too, with the largest number of pro bono costs orders made in our history and the payment of the first sum of undistributed damages from an opt out collective actions case at the Competition Appeal Tribunal.



Looking ahead to 2026 we need to continue to rise to the challenges the advice sector is facing. We will be continuing our leading work on exploring new additional funding models to support access to justice, championing the impact of advice and we hope to continue to further expand our grant making with funding coming through from collective actions.

I would like to thank our dedicated and committed staff team, my fellow Trustees including our excellent former Chair Gavin Mansfield, our funders, donors and the amazing frontline agencies who are making a difference to their clients and communities.

The difference our funding makes

Reaching communities in need.

We direct funding to places and people where legal problems go unaddressed, to communities facing the highest barriers, whether these are geography, language, poverty, or a system they've never been helped to navigate.

More people in need accessing support.

Demand for free legal advice continues to outstrip supply. We want to help that gap close by reaching more people and funding more organisations to deliver services at scale.

Funding to meet community needs.

Charities do their best work when they're not constantly firefighting. We prioritise flexible, multi-year grants that give organisations the stability to plan, collaborate, and innovate.

Wider engagement to improve understanding.

We leverage our advice and grantee networks to encourage better understanding and awareness of legal rights.


Our Long-Term Partnerships

As an experienced grant maker we have long-term partnerships with both the National Lottery Community Fund and the Ministry of Justice. These collaborations have enabled us to award tens of millions in multi-year funding to improve access to advice.



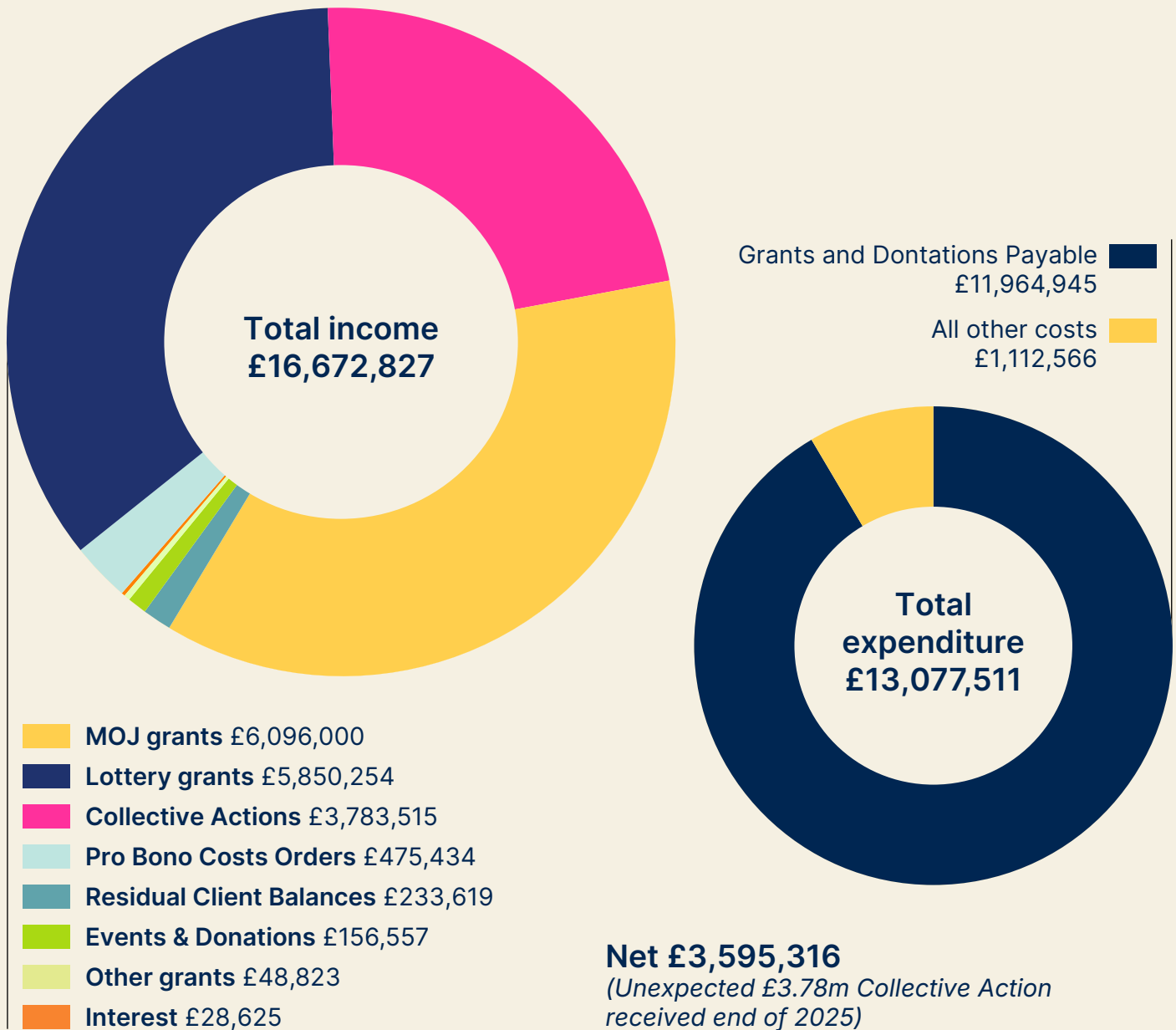
Funded by
UK Government
Wedi ei ariannu gan
Llywodraeth y DU

264,390
beneficiaries
supported



206,852
issues addressed

▶ How we raised and distributed funds in 2025



2025 was our highest income year ever, raising over £16.6 million.

We received our first income via opt-out collective actions, totalling over £3.7 million, contributing to an unplanned net income of over £3.5 million, funds we're putting straight to work through new grants in early 2026 that will support consumers across the UK.

In total, we made grant payments of £11.96 million to funded partners, supported by the National Lottery Community Fund and the Ministry of Justice. Our non-grant expenditure was £1.11 million, just 8.5% of total expenditure. We keep our overheads low so as much money as possible reaches the frontline.

2. Raising funds

▶ How we work as a fundraiser

We're not a standard funder; we raise money as well as distribute it. Because we're not an endowed foundation, we understand how important it is to get money in and out to organisations efficiently. That drives us to be creative, proactive, and persistent in finding new ways to bring resource in to deliver free legal advice.

We operate across the UK, connecting with advice providers at national, regional, and local levels. As a trusted partner for government and institutional funders, we offer stability, scalability, and genuine accountability making us the natural home for anyone who wants their money to go further for access to justice.

We raise money in several ways:

- **Partnering with major funders** to distribute funding at scale.
- **Channeling support from the legal profession** through Pro Bono Costs Orders and undistributed damages from opt-out collective actions in the Competition Appeal Tribunal.
- **Working with law firms of all sizes to put residual client balances to good use**, backed by indemnities that give firms confidence to act.
- **Supporting individuals who want to fund access to justice** through donations and events.

Bindmans

At Bindmans, social responsibility is part of the firm's DNA. The firm's founder, the late Sir Geoffrey Bindman KC (Hon), was a local activist who helped to found Camden Law Centre, one of our funded partners.

Through the Bindmans Social Justice Fund, a first of its kind initiative in the legal industry, 10% of fees paid by business clients go into a dedicated fund, from which ATJF receives 50%.

Shared values are the common thread across every firm that supports us. There are many ways to contribute, and we work with every supporter to find the right one for them.



119
organisations
funded

Jonathan's Justice Journey

Each year hundreds of people walk, run and row to raise funds to increase access to justice. In 2025 one supporter took on the novel challenge of travelling from the heart of the City of London to Leeds using only local buses.

Jonathan Grant's challenge took in many towns where our funded partners work and highlighted just how difficult it can be to travel by public transport once you are outside London, even in relatively affluent areas. This brought home just one of the obstacles people face when accessing justice.

Jonathan, who works at the Bank of England, made it to his destination and raised thousands of pounds.



“ It was important for me to support a charity that operates across the whole of the UK and so was glad to support The Access to Justice Foundation and see for myself how many towns on route had charities that are being funded.”

Pro Bono Costs Orders

When a parking firm issued thousands of pounds worth of fines to a young commuter, law firm Keidan Harrison stepped in pro bono. They won and when an appeal against costs was also dismissed, a £10,240 Pro Bono Costs Order was made in our favour to fund free legal advice for more people.

Not every Pro Bono Costs Order is paid promptly. We're grateful to Cooley, Norton Rose Fulbright, and Pallas Partners, who take on enforcement action on our behalf, also pro bono. Their patient, skilled work helped us recover almost £100,000 in 2025.

NEWS

Menu

England | Local News

'I got fined £11k over a five-minute parking rule'



Hannah Robinson has been hit with parking charge notices totalling £11,000 since 2021

3. Making grants

We're committed to long-term, evidence-driven funding that works toward systemic change and social justice. We direct grants where they're needed most to help places and communities with the greatest need and least access to advice.

We fund approaches that make a real difference for people who need it most, across the full spectrum of legal need:

- **Public legal education** that helps communities understand their rights.
- **Preventative and early resolution work** that stops problems escalating.
- **Specialist legal advice** for complex issues.
- **Frontline learning and research** that drives systems change and better policy.



““ *We feel like true partners, not simply grantees, and the consistent effort to bring partners together is very much appreciated.*

The openness of this grant, not only in core funding but also the learning that is taking place, has enabled us to reflect on our practices - something we see as essential for meaningful, lasting impact.” - Frontline funded partner



155
grants in place

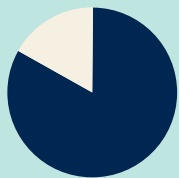


£44,909,301
grants in place

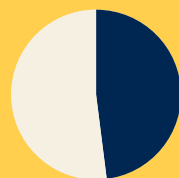
2025 Impact

Clients who receive legal advice reported outcomes:

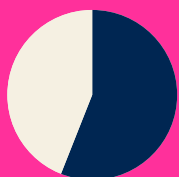
- ▶ 76% resolve their problems earlier and avoid going to court.
- ▶ 76% have a clear understanding of their legal problem and the action they need to take to resolve it.
- ▶ 73% in control of their situation and able to deal with their problems.



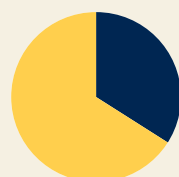
83% of service users experience poverty



48% of service users live with a disability



56% of service users are women



40% of service users are from a racial or ethnic minority

Noah worked as a full-time carer, while also managing his disability. Noah struggled with being undermined and repeatedly looked over at work, he felt unfairly treated compared to colleagues, potentially due to his disability.

When his health took a turn for the worse due to his disability Noah went on sick leave. A few days later he received a letter from his employer suggesting he find a different job.

Pursuing a case for unfair dismissal and disability discrimination takes real stamina. At one of the most challenging times in his life Noah was overwhelmed by trying to prepare for a hearing and pulling together detailed evidence.

Thanks to funding from The Access to Justice Foundation Citizens Advice Flintshire was there to help him set out the details of his claims clearly, and supported him through negotiations with advisers eventually securing a settlement of £7,500 through ACAS. Now Noah has financial security enabling Noah to move on and focus on finding work where he's properly valued.

Early intervention is at the heart of what we fund

When people get the right advice at the right time, problems get resolved before they become crises. This means fewer court cases, fewer employment disputes, and fewer people ending up homeless or destitute.

Our investment in advice saves costs down the line

Unresolved legal problems drive financial insecurity and mental health deterioration increasing reliance on emergency services, healthcare, policing, and social care. Unrepresented litigants prolong court proceedings, adding to backlogs.

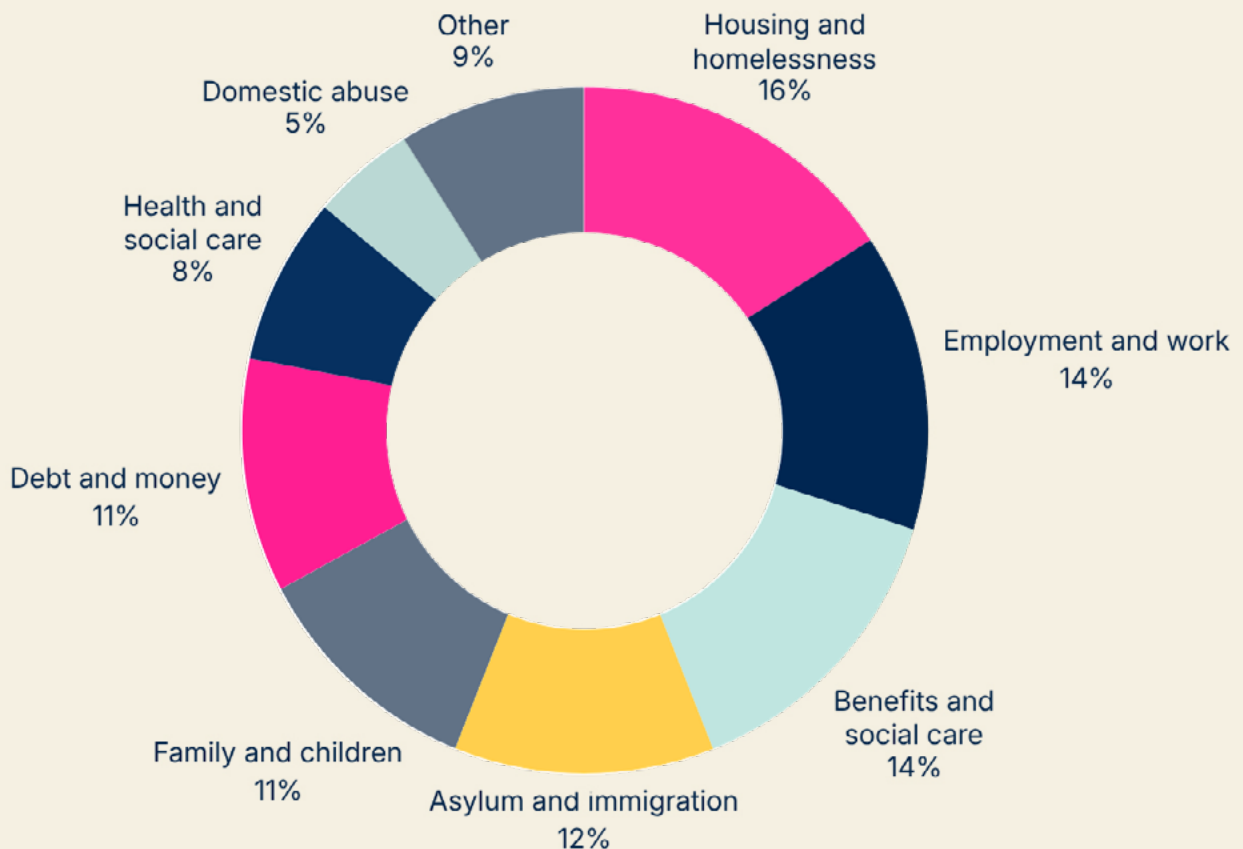
Every £1 spent on legal advice generates £2.71 in wider economic savings by keeping people in their homes and jobs, reducing poverty, and cutting the burden on other public services.

Funder Plus

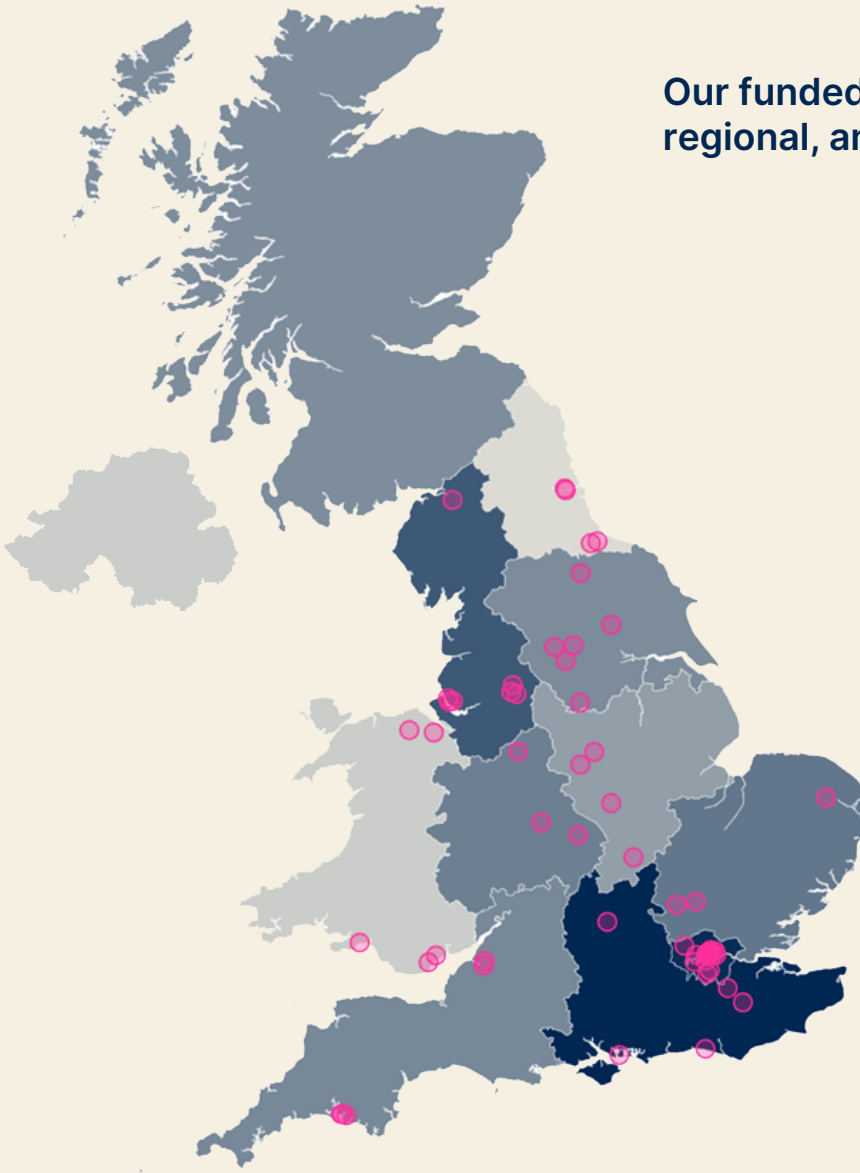
Funding alone isn't enough. We want to have open, honest conversations with our funded partners about what support they need to deliver services that genuinely meet community needs.

We created the Funded Partner Support Programme, delivered by the Legal Aid Practitioners Group Management and Leadership Hub, which offers hands-on organisational development support to the leaders running free legal advice organisations.

The programme helps people build the skills, resilience, and precision to lead their organisations well, not just in stable times, but when things get hard so that communities can rely on these services to last.



Our funded partners: serving local, regional, and UK-wide communities.



Carol was sexually harassed by a colleague at work but when she reported it her employer's investigation was inadequate and her complaint was dismissed for "insufficient evidence." Her manager's attitude towards her changed, she became isolated at work, and the perpetrator remained in post.

The toll on Carol's mental health was serious. Not knowing what options she had, or whether anything could be done, she turned to Rights of Women. Rights of Women explained her rights, walked her through potential claims for sexual harassment, and made sure she knew about key issues affecting her position on tribunal deadlines.

Funding from The Access to Justice Foundation enables organisations including Rights of Women to provide a holistic legal advice and support service. Thanks to their interventions Carol protected her position in relation to tribunal time limits and opened the door to settlement discussions. Having clear information and supportive guidance helped her feel empowered to make informed choices about her future and prioritise her wellbeing.

4. Looking ahead

Landmark moment in collective actions

2026 will kick off our first collective actions grants programme, distributing £3.78 million from the Gutmann v SW Trains case. These are three-year, unrestricted grants delivering long-term, flexible funding that helps organisations plan, retain skilled staff, and genuinely meet community need.

We'll continue to actively engage in other live cases in the Competition Appeal Tribunal, working with legal teams across these cases and intervening when invited to by the Tribunal. We'll work to ensure that as more collective actions progress, the funding generated is invested in supporting consumers and the wider economy.

Collective Actions: From Courtroom to Community

Collective actions should deliver real benefit to real people. But what happens when claimants don't come forward to collect what they're owed?

That's exactly what happened in Gutmann v South Western Trains, a case brought alleging that train companies unlawfully charged passengers twice for part of the same journey. The Competition Appeal Tribunal approved a £25 million settlement in May 2024 but only £216,500 was claimed by affected passengers.

As the prescribed charity designated to receive undistributed damages from opt-out collective actions, we put forward a clear case to the Tribunal for how those funds could be redistributed to reach the same communities who may have been impacted by the legal case.

In September 2025, the Tribunal approved the plan: £3.78 million would be awarded to The Access to Justice Foundation. We consulted key partners immediately, published our grants strategy in October 2025 in collaboration with Advice UK, Age UK, Citizens Advice and Which?, and in January 2026 launched a three-year unrestricted grants programme targeting the regions where class members are based or where need is most persistent.

A new £20 million Ministry of Justice grants programme

In December 2025, the government announced that The Access to Justice Foundation will manage a new £20 million grant for legal support, running from October 2026 to March 2029.

The new grant will focus on gathering evidence on what works, so we can build the case for longer term funding. We're proud of the partnership we've built with the Ministry of Justice, and of the trust that comes with being asked to steward a programme of this scale.



5. Help us achieve access to justice

Everything we do depends on the generosity and commitment of people who share our belief that justice shouldn't be a luxury. Whether you're a solicitor, a barrister, a trainee, or someone who simply cares about justice, **there's a meaningful way to get involved.**

Donate your firm's residual client balances

Unclaimed client funds sitting dormant in your accounts can be put to meaningful use. We pool contributions from hundreds of firms to fund impactful grants for communities in need, and we provide written indemnities to protect your firm should a client come forward later. No financial risk, no complicated process. Get in touch at clientbalances@atjf.org.uk.

Apply for a Pro Bono Costs Order

When you win a civil case pro bono, you can apply for a Pro Bono Costs Order (PBCO) or include one in a settlement. We're asking every lawyer undertaking pro bono work to make this standard practice. For support navigating the process, reach us at costs@atjf.org.uk.

Take part in a Legal Walk or start one!

Each year, Legal Walks bring legal communities together from Aberdeen to Plymouth, raising money for free legal advice in local communities. If there's a walk near you, please support it. If there isn't, start one, our Walk Organiser Pack gives you everything you need. Get in touch at events@atjf.org.uk.



Make justice part of your legacy

A gift in your will is a chance to make your belief in fairness and equity last beyond your lifetime, becoming part of a future where people facing housing crises, family breakdowns, benefit disputes or employment problems can get the expert help they need. To find out more, contact our Development Director Bhavini Bhatt at bhavinibhatt@atjf.org.uk. We'd be glad to talk it through.



Every contribution counts

There's no single way to support us, and no contribution too small. What matters is that more people join us in this work because while the need is growing, so is our ambition to meet it.

➤ Find out more at www.atjf.org.uk/support-us.





The Access to Justice
Foundation

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The Access to Justice Foundation is a company limited by guarantee (No. 6714178) and is a charity registered in England and Wales (No. 1126147) and in Scotland (No. SC048584). Its registered office is 7 Bell Yard, London WC2A 2JR.