

PRESS RELEASE - 6 July 2017

Legal Aid Practitioners Group announces winners of its Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards

Some 500 legal aid practitioners gathered in central London last night to celebrate the work of access to justice lawyers.

Winner of the top award for outstanding achievement at this year's Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year (LALY) awards was Sue James, from Hammersmith & Fulham Law Centre. Sue has been a lawyer for 28 years and was described as having spent her career to fighting for 'the dispossessed and repossessed, the mentally ill and the poor'.

Sue runs two housing duty desk schemes and was the driving force behind the creation of Ealing Law Centre after the borough's main social welfare law provider collapsed in 2011.

As one colleague said of Sue: 'There can't be many people who work full time in a law centre and in their spare time set up another.'

Also honoured by the LALY judges was a former asylum-seeker, who arrived in the UK in 2004 speaking no English, and is now a successful immigration lawyer, with a string of reported cases. Accepting the Immigration and Asylum law award from Baroness Doreen Lawrence, Kaweh Beheshtizadeh told the LALY audience he had been inspired to become an immigration lawyer after seeing how hard his own legal aid solicitor fought for him.

As well as her legal work, Sue James writes a popular column for the website Legal Voice, which brings her client's stories vividly to life. These have included a woman who took her one lightbulb from room to room; and a mother penalised under the bedroom tax after her daughter died, leaving her with a 'spare room'.

The LALY judges said through her writing Sue had 'done more than many professional campaigners to spread the true story of legal aid to the unconverted or the unbothered'.

Full list of LALY17 award winners:

1. Legal Aid Newcomer - Tom Royston, Garden Court North
2. Immigration & Asylum - Kaweh Beheshtizadeh, Barnes, Harrild & Dyer
3. Legal Aid Barrister - Philip Rule, No5 Chambers

4. Family Private (inc Mediation) - Mary Shaw, David Gray Solicitors
5. Family Public - Sheila Donn, Philcox Gray Solicitors
6. Social & Welfare - Stuart Luke, Bhatia Best
7. Public Law - Keith Lomax, Minton Morrill Solicitors
8. Criminal Defence - Graeme Hydari, Hodge, Jones & Allen
9. Children's Rights - Solange Valdez-Symonds, Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens/Migrant Resource Centre
10. Legal Aid Firm/Not-for-profit Agency - Community Law Partnership
11. Access to Justice through IT - Advicenow, Law for Life
12. Outstanding Achievement - Sue James, Hammersmith & Fulham Law Centre

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Notes for editors

1. The Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards are organised on a not-for-profit basis by the Legal Aid Practitioners Group, to celebrate the work of publicly-funded lawyers. They were founded in 2003.
2. LAPG is a membership organisation which represents lawyers delivering publicly-funded services. It operates throughout England and Wales, and members include private practice and not-for-profit organisations, barristers and costs lawyers. www.lapg.co.uk
3. The LALYs are funded by the generosity of our sponsors. Sponsors of the 2017 awards were: Friends of LALY17; Tikit; Resolution; The Bar Council; DG Legal; Accesspoint; Irwin Mitchell; CILEx; The Law Society; The Legal Education Foundation; Matrix Chambers; Legal Action Group; TV Edwards; Bidwell Henderson.