



Legal Aid Practitioners Group

2015

**LEGAL AID
LAWYER
OF THE YEAR AWARDS**

13th year

PRESS RELEASE

Solicitor to family of Mark Duggan and charity behind string of successful legal aid judicial reviews honoured at last night's Legal Aid Practitioners Group's Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards

The event also saw leading lights behind challenge to government moves to slash fees for criminal defence firms presented with LAPG 'special award'.

Marcia Willis-Stewart, a London-based legal aid solicitor, who acted for the family at the inquest into the 2011 police shooting of Mark Duggan, was named **Public Law Solicitor** of the year at last night's (1 July 2015) Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards ceremony.

Public Law Project, a national legal charity which aims to improve access to justice for the poor and disadvantaged, received the evening's top award for **Outstanding Achievement**, in recognition of its role in fighting the legal aid cuts with a series of successful judicial reviews.

Criminal Law Solicitors Association's **Bill Waddington** and **Robin Murray**, and London Criminal Courts Solicitors Association's **Jonathan Black** and **Paul Harris** were presented with a special award by the LAPG committee for their tireless campaigning against government reforms to criminal legal aid. The award came on the day (1 July) when a second 8.75 per cent fee cut was imposed. This is only the second time such an award has been made: the first went to Doreen Lawrence in 2012 for her campaigning on behalf of her son, Stephen.

Public Law award winner Marcia Willis-Stewart is managing partner of Birnberg Peirce, and was described by the LALY judges as 'bringing some of the highest profile, most highly charged and important cases of our age'.

It was Mark Duggan's killing in Tottenham which sparked widespread rioting.

Marcia also acted for the family of Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes, shot dead by police in 2005, when they mistook him for a would-be suicide bomber; and is representing the families of 75 victims of the 1989 Hillsborough disaster in the current inquest.

Despite the scale of her work, Marcia herself has remained relatively low profile, and the announcement of her victory was met with loud cheering and prolonged applause by the 400-strong audience at the event in central London.

The LALY judges said:

'These are huge cases in every sense of the word, demanding not just strong legal skills, but huge reserves of tact, diplomacy, leadership and organisation. These are cases where the outcome will have an impact not just on the families directly affected, but whole communities, whole cities, and even the whole country.'

Public Law Project was presented with the award for Outstanding Achievement in recognition of its repeated success in challenging government cuts to legal aid last year.

The LALY judges described these victories as 'bringing a few chinks of light' to practitioners during what had been a challenging year.

PLP's successes include preventing implementation of the legal aid residence test (R (Public Law Project v Secretary of State for Justice [2014] EWHC 2365 (Admin)); and a challenge to the 'no permission, no payment' regulations for publicly-funded judicial reviews (R (Ben Hoare Bell and ors) v Lord Chancellor [2015] EWHC 523 (Admin)); and having the Legal Aid Agency's exceptional case funding scheme declared unlawful (R (Gudanaviciene and ors) v Director of Legal Aid Casework [2014] EWHC 1840 (Admin)). Other equally significant challenges are also underway.

The former vice-president of the court of appeal (civil division) Sir Henry Brooke CMG PC is a patron of PLP and joined members of its staff on stage to receive the award.

There are 13 awards in total this year. Full list below:

1. LAPG committee special award: Bill Waddington, Robin Murray, Jonathan Black, Paul Harris
2. Outstanding achievement: Public Law Project
3. Public law: Marcia Willis-Stewart, Birnberg Peirce
4. Legal aid firm/not for profit agency: Central England Law Centre
5. Children's rights: Noel Arnold (Coram Children's Legal Centre)
6. Legal aid newcomer: Connor Johnston (Garden Court Chambers)
7. Social and welfare: Jo Renshaw (Turpin & Miller)
8. Family legal aid: Sarah Cove (Miles & Partners)
9. Family mediator: Margaret Pendlebury (MiD Mediation)
10. Legal aid barrister: Alison Pickup (Doughty Street)
11. Housing: Jayesh Kunwardia (Hodge Jones & Allen)
12. Criminal defence: Mark Ashford (TV Edwards)

13. Access to justice through IT: Courtnav (Royal Courts of Justice Advice Bureau & Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer)

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The LAPG Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards are non-profit-making and held to celebrate the work of grassroots lawyers. They are into their 13th year.
2. LAPG is the leading membership organisation for lawyers working in the access to justice sector. www.lapg.co.uk
3. The award compere was Sky News' Anna Jones; the awards were presented by Lord Justice Andrew McFarlane, who also chairs the judging panel.
4. Award sponsors were: Legal Action (media partner); Anglia DNA; Tikit; Resolution; Bar Council; Irwin Mitchell; Law Society; Accesspoint; DG Legal; CILEx; Legal Education Foundation; Matrix Legal Aid Link.