

PRESS RELEASE - 11 JULY 2019

Legal Aid Practitioners Group announces winners of its 2019 Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards

Paul Bowen QC, who acted in key right to die and assisted suicide cases, named as Outstanding Achievement award winner at last night's ceremony.

Other winners included charity Child Poverty Action Group, which brought a string of challenges to welfare benefits cuts; and criminal defence solicitor Lydia Dagostino, who specialises in protest-related work, including acting for Extinction Rebellion.

The 11 winners were announced last night at a ceremony in central London in front of an audience of nearly 500 legal aid lawyers. They were presented with their awards by Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, who told them: 'I am a proud legal aid lawyer.' She added: 'We are all guardians of the rule of law. More power to your elbow.'

Paul Bowen QC was honoured for his human rights work, which includes acting in the right to die and assisted suicide cases brought by Debbie Purdy and Tony Nicklinson. Accepting his Outstanding Achievement award, Paul said his 'legal aid heroes' were his clients, some of whom were in the audience.

'I want to thank the solicitors and clients who trusted me enough to instruct me in some fascinating and important cases for some of them at the most difficult times of their lives.'

Paul paid particular tribute to Dr Sara Ryan, whose 18-year-old son Connor Sparrowhawk drowned in the bath at a specialist NHS unit.

He said:

'Sara's campaign to establish the truth about his entirely preventable death has inspired many others to press for improved community services for learning disabled people, and greater accountability when their loved ones die in institutions that are supposed to care for them.'

He also cited Graham and Wendy Enderby, the couple behind the ground-breaking 2004 case HL v UK.

Paul said:

'In 1994, Graham and Wendy took into their home a man with learning difficulties known to mental health lawyers and wider than just mental health lawyers now as HL. He had been living in Borehamwood community hospital for 30 years before going to live with Graham and Wendy as part of the then care in the community policy. Three years later, HL's psychiatrist decided he needed to be re-admitted to hospital and Graham and Wendy were forbidden from seeing him or having any contact with him. And their fight to have him returned home went all the way to European Court of Human Rights where they achieved a famous victory, establishing important rights for detained incapacitated patients and leading to major changes in legislation.'

The LAPG Committee also chose to make three Special Awards to recognise the immense contributions of District Judge Anselm Eldergill, One Pump Court barrister Rachel Francis and Irwin Mitchell solicitor Oliver Carter. This was only the third time the LAPG Committee has chosen to make Special Awards, which celebrate campaigners and others who make an exceptional contribution to legal aid and access to justice. The Special Awards were proudly supported this year by Doughty Street Chambers. For more information about the Special Award recipients [read our separate press release here](#).

LALY19 WINNERS IN FULL

1. Outstanding achievement (sponsored by Matrix Chambers)
Paul Bowen QC
2. Public law (sponsored by Irwin Mitchell)
Raja Rajeswaran Uruthiravinayagan, Duncan Lewis Solicitors
3. Criminal defence (sponsored by DG Legal)
Lydia Dagostino, Kellys Solicitors
4. Access to justice through IT (sponsored by The Legal Education Foundation)
FormShare, GT Stewart
5. Legal aid firm/Not-for-profit agency (sponsored by The Law Society)
Child Poverty Action Group
6. Legal aid practice management (sponsored by Accesspoint)
Sally Thompson, Luqmani Thompson & Partners
7. Social welfare law (sponsored by Tikit)
William Ford, Osbornes Law
8. Family legal aid - including mediation (sponsored by Resolution)
Philip Wilkins, Hudgell & Partners
9. Legal aid barrister (sponsored by The Bar Council)
Joanne Cecil, Garden Court Chambers

10. Children's rights (sponsored by Anthony Gold Solicitors)
Edward Taylor, Osbornes Law

11. Legal aid newcomer (sponsored by Friends of LALY19)
Una Morris, Garden Court Chambers

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Notes for editors

1. The Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards are organised by the Legal Aid Practitioners Group on a non-profit-making basis, and were launched in 2003.
2. A full list of finalists is available on www.lapg.co.uk
3. The Newcomer award was sponsored by Friends of LALY19, a crowdfunding campaign, which raised nearly £5,000.