

**Centre for Law & Social Justice  
The School of Law  
Leeds University**

**Legal Entitlements and Problem-  
Solving (LEaP) Project**

**Delivering legal rights through practical problem solving**

**Annual Report for 2020**



## The Cerebra LEaP Leeds Research team

### **Professor Luke Clements, Cerebra Professor of Law**



In 2016 Luke joined the School of Law at Leeds University as the Cerebra Professor of Law & Social Justice.

Luke was admitted as a solicitor in 1981 and has extensive experience of advising disabled people and their carers concerning the rights to social welfare support; he has written widely concerning these rights and provided advice to a number of independent, charitable and public bodies.

### **Dr Ana Laura Aiello Cerebra Doctoral Researcher**



In 2019 Dr Ana Laura Aiello joined the Cerebra LEaP research team at Leeds. Ana studied law and human rights in Argentina, Spain and in the UK (obtaining her PhD at Leeds University). She has worked for a number of international NGOs (including Amnesty International, Disability Rights International and CHANGE) and at universities in Argentina, Spain and the UK. Ana has a sister with learning disabilities and experience of co-working with disabled people in an accessible & inclusive way.

## The Cerebra LEaP in-house research team

### **Beverley Hitchcock**

Beverley is the Deputy Head of Research and Information at Cerebra where she additionally coordinates (among other things) the development of the 'Accessing Public Services Toolkit' and the dissemination workshops that consider the Toolkit throughout England, Wales and Scotland (discussed below).



### **Carys Hughes**

Carys is the Cerebra LEaP project co-ordinator. Carys is the Leeds programme's link with the Cerebra in-house research team. Her expertise is pivotal in responding to requests for specialist advice and then identifying commonly occurring problems on which the LEaP team can undertake in depth research.



### **Derek Tilley**

Derek is the Senior Development Officer with the Cerebra in-house research team. Derek's research (which is also central to his PhD studies) concerns the barriers that disabled children and their families experience in accessing their legal entitlements to education, health and social care services.



### **Sophie Champion**

During 2020 Sophie fulfilled the role of Project Co-ordinator (during Carys Hughes' maternity leave). Before joining Cerebra, Sophie worked as a senior paralegal adviser for a large Cardiff law firm. Sophie has a background of specialising in the legal responsibilities of the NHS to provide Continuing Healthcare funding.



### **Student Advisers**

The LEaP project has again benefitted from the research expertise of our student advisers – numbering 48 in 2020 and to whom we are most grateful. They will all be named in the research publication that they are helping to produce.

### **Particular thanks are due to:**

Colleagues from Cerebra, the Disability Law Service and the BBC who have contributed to the training and support of the student volunteers as part of the current research programme. From Cerebra, thanks to Derek Spinks, Beverley Hitchcock, Carys Hughes, Derek Tilley and Sophie Champion; from the Disability Law Service, thanks to Priya Bahri and from the BBC thanks to Hayley Brewer.

Parents of disabled children who provided videos and webinar support for the training of the student volunteers – but who, for reasons of confidentiality, we have agreed not to name.

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At the time of publication of this annual report (January 2021) we do not have a group photograph of the student volunteers – since the training and research has been undertaken remotely due to the Covid-19 emergency. We hope, in due course, to insert in this report a group photograph but at this stage the images below are of the student volunteers for 2019 and from the Conference in November 2019 launching the report 'The local government and social care ombudsman approach to delay in complaints made by disabled children and their families' (which is discussed in this report).



## **Annual Report 2020**

### **Cerebra Legal Entitlements and Problem-Solving Project**

#### **Summary of achievements in 2020**

1. The collaboration between the LEaP Project team at the School of Law, Leeds University and the Cerebra in-house research team has continued, with the Leeds team:
  - (a) providing expert input concerning specific challenges encountered by families in accessing their legal entitlements;
  - (b) helping to identify commonly occurring problems on which in-depth research can be undertaken at Leeds; and
  - (c) designing and then undertaking in-depth research on a commonly occurring problem: analysing the findings to identify good practice lessons that can reduce the prevalence / impact of these problems.
2. The completion of a major research project (jointly undertaken with the BBC and the Disability Law Service) concerning 'Unlawful restrictions on the rights of disabled children with autism to social care needs assessments' – the 'Autism Plus' report - together with the publication of a report on the findings of this research.
3. The dissemination of the 'Autism Plus' report and the development of a strategy to bring about practical change to front-line practice to address the legal failings identified by the report.
4. The commencement of the data gathering stage of a new research programme. The research concerns the prevalence of local authority policies and practices that fail to provide specialist social work support for disabled children and their families - but instead direct families to generalist 'children in need' assessors. The research, involves both quantitative and qualitative methods and seeks to assess the lawfulness of such policies and their impact on the well-being of families impacted by such policies.
5. The LEaP Project teams at the School of Law, Leeds University and the Cerebra in-house research team have continued, where practical opportunities arise, to take action to implement the recommendations that have been made in earlier LEaP research reports.
6. The identification of research priorities for 2021 – 2022.

These achievements are considered in more detail in the pages that follow.

## **Annual Report 2020**

### **Legal Entitlements and Problem-Solving (LEaP) Project**

**LEaP is an innovative problem-solving project that helps families of children with brain conditions cope with the legal barriers they face.**

#### **Background**

The laws of the four nations of the UK place enforceable duties on public bodies to provide a range of social welfare supports for disabled children and their families.

The research evidence suggests that disabled children and their families experience considerable difficulties in accessing these rights and in consequence, in accessing good quality health, social care and educational provision.

In 2013 Cerebra funded a pilot programme at Cardiff Law School to identify accessible and effective procedures that could enable disabled children and their families to maximise the benefit of their legal entitlements.

The pilot research identified a number of commonly occurring problems encountered by disabled children and their families when seeking to access their statutory entitlements. It also provided tangible evidence that effective mechanisms could be developed to address a number of these problems and thereby lead to material improvements in the wellbeing of many disabled children and their families.

In 2014 Cerebra awarded research funding to the project including the endowment of a Cerebra Chair in Law and Luke Clements became the first Law Professor to be awarded a prestigious Cerebra Chair. In January 2016 the research programme moved from Cardiff to the School of Law at Leeds University.

The LEaP project currently comprises three relatively distinct (but interconnected) components, which can be broadly described as:

- (1) research involving individual advice and support;
- (2) research of a specific nature concerning a commonly encountered legal problem; and
- (3) research concerning the practical application of emerging theories of problem solving and 'resilience building'.

#### **1. The 'individual advice and support' research strand**

Since the inception of the LEaP research programme, the Cerebra in-house research team has developed considerable expertise in dealing with the majority of 'commonly occurring' problems without the need for these to be referred to the Leeds University team. This has been beneficial for the families who make contact with Cerebra as the 'turn around' time for advice is much shorter. It has also enabled the *pro bono* student researchers to focus on specific commonly encountered problems (discussed in the next section).

Notwithstanding the legal expertise gained by Cerebra in-house team, on occasions it receives referrals on which additional input/advice is required and for which the Leeds team provides necessary expert input.

Individual referrals are of vital importance to the research, since the advice that is provided to families incorporates the problem-solving methodologies developed by the programme. This process has identified 'legal confidence' as one of the important elements that enable disabled children and their families to develop 'resilience' and the ability to persevere with the multiple challenges they face in obtaining their statutory entitlements to health, social care and educational support. This in turn requires that there be a range of high quality, up-to-date and accessible guides to the law. In addition to supporting the development and publication of the Cerebra guides, the LEaP Project has provided support for the enlargement of the Cerebra '[Template Letters](#)' library – which is one of the best UK based resources of its kind for families seeking to secure access to their legal rights to support.

## 2. The 'specific' *pro bono* student led research strand

The publication of the 2019-20 'Autism Plus' research study

Analysis of the requests for advice received by the Cerebra in-house research team identifies commonly occurring legal problems encountered by families. Each year, at least one of these problems is selected for in depth research by the Leeds research team – with a view to ascertaining its nature and prevalence and the legal context out of which it arises. The purpose of the research is to develop innovative ways of resolving such problems at 'root' – so that (ideally) they cease to be encountered by individual families.

In 2019 the LEaP Project received many referrals from families who considered that they had been treated adversely by social services authorities because of their child's autism. It appeared that a number of authorities we're not prepared to assess (or provide specific supports for) children with autism unless the child had another impairment or had a formal medical diagnosis. Families complained that such policies adversely affected them by (for example) denying them respite care, direct payments and parent carer assessments. This problem – of what we refer to as 'Autism Plus' policies – had also been identified by the Disability Law Service with which both the School of Law at Leeds and Cerebra have a good working relationship. In 2018 the Disability Law Service had undertaken a pilot research project which suggested that many local authorities had explicit written policies of this kind.

Working with the Disability Law Service and the BBC, the Leeds team sought to identify the extent of this problem and the legality of such policies. The research involved the BBC sending Freedom of Information (FoI) requests to every English Children's Social Services authority. The responses to these requests were then analysed by the Leeds team (with the support of 35 volunteer student researchers) which additionally searched the web sites of these authorities to identify their assessment 'eligibility' policies.

In August 2020 (during the Covid-19 emergency) the report of the research findings was published jointly by Cerebra, the School of Law at Leeds, the Disability Law Service and the BBC. The report '[Unlawful restrictions on the rights of disabled children with autism to social care needs](#)

assessments<sup>1</sup> received wide publicity. It concluded that over 40% of English local authorities had failed (contrary to their legal duties) to publish accessible / intelligible assessment policies and that 41 local authorities had policies that explicitly discriminated against children with autism.

The report called for swift action by Children's Social Services Authorities; the English Government, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and Parliament to remedy the discrimination it identified. Prior to its publication Cerebra, the Leeds team and the Disability Law Service met with the EHRC. We advised the Commission that we intended to write to each of the 41 local authorities asking that they amend their policies, to ensure that they were compliant with their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the Children Act 1989. The EHRC asked that it be notified of the responses we received to these letters so that it could then decide what follow up action might be appropriate. Correspondence with these local authorities is on-going at the date of this report.

### The commencement of the 2020-21 research study

In early 2020 (as a result of our analysis of the requests for advice received by the Cerebra and colleague NGOs) it was decided that the research programme for the academic year 2020 – 2021 should be a development of the 'Autism Plus' study. It was clear that many families were continuing to suffer significant adverse consequences from their disabled children being classified as 'children in need' rather than more specifically, as 'disabled children'. We considered it important to undertake this further stage of research in order to ascertain whether this difference in treatment had a material adverse impact on families.

The research study, which commenced in October 2020, benefited from work by 48 School of Law volunteers and had two distinct components. The first involved the student volunteers locating the relevant on-line policies of 149 Children's Social Services authorities in England – with a view to identifying qualitative differences between the process by which children classified simply as 'in need' were assessed compared to the process by which children classified as 'disabled children' were assessed. The second involved a survey of parent carer led organisations that sought to identify whether parents of disabled children (whose children were assessed under the 'children in need' route) considered that they and their child had been materially disadvantaged by this process.

The data gathering resulting from the on-line searches and the survey was completed at the end of 2020 and the detailed analysis of the findings is on-going. It is hoped that a report of the research study will be published in Spring of 2021.

The involvement of volunteer law students is not only invaluable for the LEaP programme (allowing detailed analysis of a large 'data set') it is also considered by the students themselves to be a hugely enriching experience. In this context, students refer not only to the research skills they acquire during the programme but also to the personal insights they gain from witnessing – first hand – the challenges families experience when trying to access their legal entitlements and of being able to see the

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<sup>1</sup> P Bahri, L Clements, A L Aiello and T Hutchinson [Unlawful restrictions on the rights of disabled children with autism to social care needs assessments](#) (Cerebra 2020).

wonderful work of undertaken by Cerebra. Appendix 3 to this report includes a selection of feedback comments received from the students in December 2020.

### **3. The problem solving and ‘resilience building’ research strand**

As noted in previous annual reports, a key objective of the LEaP research project is to critically analyse the knowledge gained from the individual advice and the generic research strands in order to achieve a practical understanding of why commonly occurring legal problems arise and to devise practical mechanisms to overcome these difficulties.

In 2015, with the administrative and organisational support from Cerebra and an ESRC Impact Acceleration Award, a ‘Toolkit’ was prepared that summarised the main problem-solving approaches that had emerged from the LEaP programme. The project included the recruitment and training of eight parents of disabled children (as ‘experts by experience’) to critique drafts of the Toolkit and then to disseminate the research to their wider communities.

In 2017 a new edition of the Toolkit was published (re-titled the Cerebra ‘Accessing Public Services Toolkit’) and in the same year a Scottish Law version of the Toolkit was also published. The Toolkits have been well received by families with disabled children and the Cerebra LEaP programme now runs a rolling programme of seminars / workshops demonstrating how the Toolkit can be used in practice. Further details of the Toolkit dissemination programme are provided as Appendix 2 at the end of this report.

### **Implementation and impact of earlier research**

The LEaP programme has produced a significant number of research reports since its inception. These are listed in Appendix 1 at the end of this report. We are conscious that such reports are not ‘self-executing’ and that in order for them to effect real change in practice – ie change that materially improves the experiences of families with disabled children – there is a need for concerted action to ensure that the findings are implemented by the relevant public bodies. This means that it is essential that we continue to monitor the impact of all our research reports and not simply the most recent.

#### **Free home to school transport**

The 2017 research report on this issue identified a significant number of councils who were operating policies that were unlawful – in that they misrepresented the detail and / or the extent of their council’s legal duties. In order to effect change, the dissemination and implementation strategy for this research included: (1) a major conference to publicise the research findings; and (2) the need for action and ‘one to one’ discussions with the Department for Education (DfE) concerning the need for revised guidance. This strategy resulted (in 2018) in the DfE producing revised draft guidance on which the LEaP team was invited to comment. Problematically updated ‘fit for purpose’ guidance has not (as at January 2021) been issued. In part this can be attributed to the political distractions of Brexit and Covid-19 but it is a pending issue that we need to address.

In addition to this action, the Cerebra in-house team has produced acclaimed guides to the legal rights of families to free school transport (in England and Wales)<sup>2</sup> and template letters for families to use when seeking to challenge council refusals of support. The Cerebra in-house research team continue – on a regular basis – to provide support for families experiencing difficulties of this kind.

School transport difficulties are not limited to England and in 2020 the LEaP team obtained Counsel's Opinion on two specific policies adopted by Welsh councils that undermine the rights of families in Wales to school transport support.

### Disabled Children and the Cost Effectiveness of Home Adaptations & Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

The 2017 research report<sup>1</sup> – undertaking in collaboration with the 'Access Committee for Leeds' – concerning the cost effectiveness of DFGs demonstrated that substantial cost savings to councils resulted from the award of such grants. The report has been widely cited including in a House of Commons Library Briefing Paper<sup>3</sup> and a Research Review report commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care.<sup>4</sup> The English Government has indicated that action concerning adaptations to address the needs of disabled people will be detailed in a forthcoming social care Green Paper. The LEaP project has established a good working relationship with Foundations<sup>5</sup> and in 2020 Professor Luke Clements took part in a webinar with local authority Occupational Therapists concerning the cost benefits of providing such grants. Luke has also posted technical details of the legal duties to provide DFGs in England and (with Ann James) written an equivalent piece for the Rhydian on-line Journal for Wales.<sup>6</sup>

### Direct payments for disabled children and their families

The 2018 research report<sup>7</sup> concerning direct payments for disabled children, resulted from families' considerable dissatisfaction with the administration by councils of 'Direct Payments': payments to enable families them to purchase support services to meet their eligible social care needs. The research found that the value of Direct Payments being made by many councils were insufficient to enable families to purchase sufficient specialist care to enable them to care for their disabled child and also to enable them to live 'ordinary' lives. Although the report received good publicity – in practice the problem persists in England and in Wales with the LEaP team continuing to advise families on action they can take to challenge inadequate Direct Payment packages. In part this can be attributed to the political distractions of Brexit and Covid-19 and the delay of the English

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<sup>2</sup> Cerebra [School Transport in England](#) (Cerebra 2017) Cerebra [School Transport in Wales](#) (Cerebra 2019).

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Library Briefing Paper '[Disabled facilities grants for home adaptations](#)' (July 2018).

<sup>4</sup> S Mackintosh and others [Disabled Facilities Grant \(DFG\) and Other Adaptations – External Review](#) (2018).

<sup>5</sup> The National Body for Home Improvement Agencies in England – funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

<sup>6</sup> See [Disabled Facilities Grants and Young People in England](#) and [Disabled Facilities Grants in Wales: the legality of charging families for home adaptations to accommodate the needs of disabled young people](#)

<sup>7</sup> L Clements, S Woodin, S McCormack and D Tilley [Direct Payments for Disabled Children and Young People and their Families](#) (Cerebra 2018).

Government to publish its proposals for the reform of social care funding, but this (again) is clearly an issue that calls for follow up action.

#### The accessibility of disabled facilities grants application forms

The 2016 research concerning the cost benefits of DFGs (noted above),<sup>8</sup> identified problematic delays in the processing of the grants that facilitate these adaptations. Follow up research on this issue in 2018<sup>9</sup> identified a number of unlawful mechanisms adopted by local authorities to slow the processing of DFG grants. This research (as with the 2016 DFG research) was cited by a Research Review report commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care.<sup>10</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that local authorities are now making available DFG application forms but there is a need for this to be objectively verified by further research.

#### Disability related expenditure and pets care costs

The 2018 research report<sup>11</sup> on this issue resulted from approaches to the Leeds LEaP team that identified a specific difficulty families experienced in paying social care charges and in addition, paying for their basic living costs and the costs of keeping a much loved pet. The research found that no council in the study sample, had a formal policy concerning the disregard of pet ownership expenses and that almost nine in ten indicated that pet care costs would not be taken into account 'in any circumstances'. The research findings were well-publicised, but council charges continue to be a significant problem for many disabled people and their families. It appears possible that this issue may be the subject of legal proceedings (by aggrieved disabled people) but it is another issue that calls for follow up action.

#### The local government and social care ombudsman's approach to delay in complaints made by disabled children and their families

This 2019 report<sup>12</sup> resulted from evidence gained by the Cerebra in-house research team of the problems families had experienced – of delay in obtaining justice when complaining about a council. The report was launched at a major LEaP Conference held in Leeds in November 2019. The LEaP research team continues to correspond with the English Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) on this question and to date, no remedial action (of the kind proposed in the report) has been taken by the LGO. In part this can be attributed to the problems the LGO has experienced by the Covid-19 emergency but the inaction remains a significant cause for concern and is clearly an issue that calls for follow up action.

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<sup>8</sup> L Clements and S McCormack [Disabled Children and the Cost Effectiveness of Home Adaptations & Disabled Facilities Grants](#) (Cerebra 2017).

<sup>9</sup> L Clements and S McCormack [The accessibility of Disabled Facilities Grant application forms](#) (Cerebra 2018).

<sup>10</sup> S Mackintosh and others [Disabled Facilities Grant \(DFG\) and Other Adaptations – External Review](#) (2018).

<sup>11</sup> L Clements and S McCormack [Disability related expenditure and pets care costs](#) (Cerebra 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Luke Clements and A L Aiello [Unacceptable delay: Complaints procedures for disabled children and their families](#) (Cerebra 2019).

## 2020 publications and presentations

### Publications

- P Bahri, L Clements, A L Aiello and T Hutchinson [Unlawful restrictions on the rights of disabled children with autism to social care needs assessments](#) (Cerebra 2020).
- L Clements and J Anstey 'Coronavirus and [Children with short lives](#)' (Legal Action Bulletin November 2020).`1
- A M Pollock, L Clements and L Harding-Edgar '[Towards a National Care Service](#)' in Tribune Spring 2020 pp 20 – 25.
- A M Pollock, L Clements and L Harding-Edgar '[Covid-19: why we need a national health and social care service](#)' (editorial) British Medical Journal 2020; 369: m1465 doi: 10.1136/bmj.m1465 (14 April 2020).
- S Broach and L Clements [Disabled Children: a legal handbook](#) published (Legal Action Group, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 2020).
- L Clements [Clustered injustice and the level green](#) (Legal Action Group 2020).

### Public engagement:

- 5 February 2020 ~ Luke Clements spoke at a 'Sustainable Care' seminar at the British Academy London concerning carer related law reform in England.
- 21 May 2020 ~ Luke Clements contributed to a Social Work Action Network (SWAN) webinar concerning 'Covid-19, human rights and social work legislation in the UK'.
- 15 June 2020 ~ Luke Clements delivered a webinar for the Centre for International Research on Care, Labour and Equalities (Sheffield University) concerning '[Carers and the failure of identity](#)'.
- 9 November 2020 ~ Luke Clements delivered a webinar for the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) SE Region concerning NHS Continuing Care and Children and Young People.
- 1 December 2020 ~ Luke Clements contributed to a Forum for Human Rights and Social Justice webinar 'Justice Matters in the North' (other speakers included Baroness Hale of Richmond DBE and Professor Philip Alston).
- 15 December 2020 ~ Luke Clements contributed to a Foundations webinar concerning the cost benefits of disabled facilities grants for disabled children.

It has been another successful research year and for all of us involved in the Cerebra LEaP Project an enjoyable one. I end this report by making very special thanks to everyone at Cerebra for the wonderful support we have received.



Professor Luke Clements  
16<sup>th</sup> January 2021

## Appendix 1

### LEaP research publications as December 2020

#### Research reports / publications

- 2013 A [Digest of Opinions](#) concerning commonly occurring legal problems that disabled children and their families encounter;
- 2014 A further [Digest of Opinions](#) concerning commonly occurring legal problems that disabled children and their families encounter;
- 2015 A generic research report on the accessibility and accuracy of '[Short Breaks Statements](#)' involving over 40% of English social services authorities;
- 2016 A '[Problem-Solving Toolkit](#)' to support disabled children and their families who experience difficulties in relation to health, social care or other support services;
- 2017 [Disabled Children and the Cost Effectiveness of Home Adaptations & Disabled Facilities Grants](#);
- 2017 [Local Authority Home to School On-line Transport Policies: Accessibility and Accuracy](#);
- 2017 A new edition of the '[Problem-Solving Toolkit](#)' now renamed as the [Accessing Public Services Toolkit](#);
- 2017 [Accessing Public Services in Scotland: A problem-solving toolkit](#);
- 2018 [Disability related expenditure and pets care costs](#);
- 2018 [The accessibility of Disabled Facilities Grant application forms in England](#);
- 2019 [Unacceptable delay: Complaints procedures for disabled children and their families](#);
- 2019 [Direct Payments for Disabled Children and Young People and their Families](#);
- 2020 [Unlawful restrictions on the rights of disabled children with autism to social care needs assessments](#).

## Appendix 2

### Toolkit data – December 2020

#### Printed copies

Since the launch of the first Toolkit in February 2016 Cerebra has had 3,740 copies printed.

#### Website downloads

- English Toolkit: 40,138 downloads;
- Scottish Toolkit: 593 downloads.

#### Workshops

From June 2016 to December 2020, there have been a total of 84 workshops. At these 84 workshops there have been 932 attendees (an average of 11 per workshop). Of these 87 workshops, 7 have been repeat bookings.

Feedback includes:

- I felt completely informed, empowered and fully confident to confront social services after attending the workshop and reading your excellent Toolkit, thank you so much! I wrote a letter of complaint to my Local Authority and I followed all of your advice to the letter. Within a short timeframe my complaint was successfully upheld, I received an apology and have also (as a result of my letter), been invited to work alongside them to reform their processes for future! I am so grateful to you as I could never have done this before the workshop or without the Toolkit.
- Thank you and for providing the really informative workshop this morning. I think I speak for all that attended these workshops are lifelines for many parents.
- By far the best workshop I been to, the relevance was amazing, delivered in a personable, realistic approach. Much appreciated by those of us that hugely identify with these difficulties!!

Not included in these workshop figures are the presentations that Cerebra has delivered on the Toolkit at events which include:

- Kidz to Adultz Exhibitions:
  - Edinburgh on 14th September 2017;
  - Coventry on the 15th March 2018;
- Tuberosus-Sclerosis Society on 9th July 2017;
- Rubinstein Taybi family day on the 15th July 2017 in Birmingham;
- Advocacy Conference, Birmingham on 19th October 2017;
- TSA Scotland Conference on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019.

## Appendix 3

### Student feedback responses – December 2020

The feedback provided by the students participating in the 2020-2021 Cerebra Pro Bono Research Programme has been excellent and generous. The following comments are typical and point to the issues considered important by our students:

#### Awareness about the relevant legal entitlements of disabled children and their families:

- *The meetings held every week were very educational and helped me understand the hardships the children and their parents face while approaching local authorities for help. Through this programme, I was able to understand how uncoordinated and intrusive these local authorities were to people asking for help.*
- *It has really taught me a lot and informed me on the issues faced by those who have disabilities and the family members who are affected by them. The way that the social services and council treat the families and parents of those with disabilities has really shocked me.*
- *This Cerebra Pro Bono project has vastly improved my awareness of the treatment of parents by local authorities. It has shown me that, socially, there is a blatant lack of awareness for parental rights with the blanket approach of treating all situations the same.*

#### Inspired by the experiences of Mums of disabled children and other guest speakers (including NGOs and media professionals):

- *Hearing from all the guest speakers, especially parents, was so helpful in understanding just how many layers of hardships are faced by parents of children with disabilities/special needs. These people are among the most deserving and disadvantaged in society, yet they are routinely discredited, ignored, and denied support by their local authorities. Knowing that this research will not only help bring about justice for parents of children with disabilities, but ensure that current and future families are able to access social care services to which they are legally entitled is beyond rewarding.*
- *They had a lot of guest speakers telling us about their road to where they are today and what they are doing today to help.*
- *The guests were particularly useful to put a face on the things discussed and to contextualise in reality the purpose and potential impact of the research.*

#### New research skills:

- *I feel that this has been a useful experience to develop my research skills.*
- *Additionally, the project has been a great way to improve research skills since everyone is given three local authorities to look at.*

- *I also learnt a lot from Luke's remarks about the process of conducting a research, writing a report and campaigning for policy change; it's a repetitive and slow process but all these little things play an important role in the bigger picture.*

**Liked to work individually as well as in groups:**

- *Through this project I was able to work with law students of all years which gave me a rare opportunity to get together with similar minds.*
- *I found that pairing individuals up to "double check" work was a great idea. It provides a sense of insurance that your work was being completed correctly. I think that all members of the student research team were highly motivated and were able to put some good work together.*
- *I liked the group work we were assigned to complete for last week- it gave us an opportunity to interact online with the other students.*

**Thought the project was nicely organised and allowed them to participate well online (despite the pandemic):**

- *I would also like to comment on how understanding you both have been about the whole pandemic situation! I was really worried when I tested positive for COVID-19 that it would hinder my ability to participate with the research but luckily it hasn't and your well wishes were very much appreciated!*
- *Obviously, this year has been very different to all others but working remotely and meeting every week has not presented any major obstacles except for the opportunity to meet Luke, Ana and my colleagues in person.*
- *Despite the disruptions of Covid-19, I have felt a sense of community.*

**Felt that they achieved a difference by taking part on the project and motivation to keep on doing similar legal work:**

- *I just wanted to say that I've loved the programme. There were times this term when I was struggling with some personal issues and very often, I would be able to throw myself into the research and it made me feel so much better because I was doing something interesting and (at least I felt) I was making some bit of difference.*
- *I really enjoyed contributing and giving my time to such exceptional project which has helped me spark an interest in non-commercial law.*
- *Being able to use my skills and abilities to resolve injustice is a rewarding feeling which makes me want to continue doing similar work.*