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Article

Effecting Change and Addressing Inequalities through Community Based Research: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

Access to legal services and pro bono community outreach projects have become embedded in the languages of policymaking and academia over the last few years, and community-based law clinics are beneficial in terms of ensuring ease of access to legal advice and consequent expansion of the number of clients served. The advantage of community justice initiatives is well established in literature and research suggests that they should be participatory, allowing people experiencing problems to play an active role in constructing the solutions. This makes it more likely that individuals will obtain the help they need for the problems they are experiencing, it increases empowerment and encourages them to take preventative action and seek help from competent sources.

In February 2024, a team of students and solicitors from Lancaster University's Law Clinic ran an outreach clinic in Blackpool, which is one of the most deprived areas in the UK. The outreach clinic aimed to reach those most marginalised and disconnected from legal advice and assistance while seeking to understand and identify approaches to bridging the access to justice gap. This paper explores the results of this project, the opportunities, challenges experienced and how they may be overcome in future projects.

I. Introduction

Across the country, many universities have undertaken community outreach legal projects which play an important role in ensuring accessibility to legal advice and assistance but they have other benefits such as: advancing social justice for under-represented groups;¹ providing an educational environment in which student advisors can engage with communities and problems to which they potentially have never been exposed; and creating an opportunity for a bottom-up approach to research.²

Community Based Research 'is a partnership of students, faculty, and community members who collaboratively engage in research with the purpose of solving a pressing community problem or effecting social change.'³ The "community" may be local, regional, or national, however, in every case the community is comprised of the 'oppressed, powerless, economically deprived or disenfranchised [...] who are disadvantaged by existing social,

¹ Katie Boyle et al. The Practitioner Perspective on Access to Justice for Social Rights: Addressing the Accountability Gap. (Nuffield Foundation 2022) <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/access-to-justice-for-social-rights-addressing-the-accountability-gap> accessed 22 April 2024.

² Law Works and CLEO (Clinical Legal Education Organisation), Law School Pro Bono and Clinic Report (2020) <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/solicitors-and-volunteers/resources/lawworks-law-school-pro-bono-and-clinics-report-2020> accessed 22 April 2024.

³ Linda F. Smith, 'Community Based Research: Introducing Students to the Lawyer's Public Citizen Role' (2017) 9 *Elon L Rev* 67, 68.

political or economic arrangements.⁴ In 2019, the Indices of Multiple Deprivation ranked Blackpool as the most deprived of 317 Local Authority areas in England with many people living below the poverty line,⁵ and it has been described as having ‘the greatest concentration of deprivation in England, with an influx of high numbers of low-income and vulnerable people’.⁶ In 2023, the Law Society found that there are significant legal advice deserts across large areas of England and Wales where people are unable to access legal aid or afford private legal.⁷ Blackpool has been identified as one of the areas where the reduction in legal aid funding has had a negative impact on the community. This project was piloted as a response to these findings.

II. Project goals

In addition to providing legal advice, the aim of the Blackpool project was to investigate the specific challenges individuals are facing when attempting to access legal advice and other related services. By achieving a better understanding of the barriers people are presented with, Lancaster University Law Clinic can consider a targeted approach to dealing with unmet legal needs in the community. The project had five key aims:

- 1) To provide legal advice for the residents of Blackpool.
- 2) To document the number of clients that attended for legal advice and to identify in which legal area most of the advice is sought.
- 3) To identify the specific challenges the community may face in accessing legal services.
- 4) To better understand how to target unmet legal needs in communities.
- 5) To use the findings from the project to inform future initiatives that have the potential to enhance not just academic research on access to justice, but also the evidence base for policy makers in identifying best practice and possible solutions to improving legal advice for disadvantaged communities.

Furthermore, the aims were intended to inform future initiatives developed by the Law Clinic, and to help identify areas for improvement in the design, development and delivery of legal outreach projects.

III. The establishment of the Blackpool Outreach Clinic

From the outset, it was important to embed the project within a deprived area such as Blackpool, as it is well known that ‘the social and financial vulnerability experienced by individuals also has a bearing on their response to legal problems, not just the acquisition of those problems.’⁸ In order for the project to be a success, it was imperative to place a strong emphasis on ‘collaborations and connections with the community.’⁹ This has enabled us to

⁴ Linda F. Smith, ‘Community Based Research: Introducing Students to the Lawyer’s Public Citizen Role’ (2017) 9 *Elon L Rev* 67, 68.

⁵ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019) *English Indices of Deprivation* <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019> accessed 23 April 2024. Also see: Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Blackpool <https://www.blackpooljsna.org.uk/Home.aspx> accessed 23 April 2024.

⁶ Blackpool Council, Blackpool Town Prospectus 2024-2023 (2024) < <https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Creating-a-better-Blackpool/Regeneration/Documents/Blackpool-Town-Prospectus-2024-2030-Accessible.pdf> > accessed 6 July 2024.

⁷ <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/campaigns/civil-justice/legal-aid-deserts#:~:text=In%20large%20areas%20of%20England,England%20and%20Wales%2C%20October%202023> accessed 6 July 2024.

⁸ Orla Drummond and Grainne McKeever, ‘Access to Justice through University Law Clinics’ (2016) https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/132654/Access-to-Justice-through-Uni-Law-Clinics-November-2015.pdf accessed 1st July 2024, 9

⁹ Sarah Butler, ‘The View from Here: Access to Justice and Community Legal Clinics’ (2012) 63 *University of New Brunswick Law Journal*, 442

build an ongoing partnership with Blackpool Library Services, a partnership that will be built on to tailor community specific projects going forward. Libraries often operate as community hubs and the only free community space where people can gather. Through this partnership public library staff become better equipped to help close the justice gap in their communities by connecting people in need of legal assistance to reliable information, resources, and services. Research by the Engaging Libraries programme found that public libraries partnering with universities to deliver a range of public engagement activities can make a significant positive impact on communities and creates an opportunity for knowledge exchange.¹⁰ This mirrors the discussion within literature that law clinics must not operate in a vacuum, but rather as part of a wider ecosystem.¹¹ Finally, as Lancaster University's law clinic is usually held on the University campus, which is around a 45-minute drive from Blackpool, the services offered would be inaccessible to those without the means to travel to the campus, thus the central location of the library provided easy access for the target audience.

IV. Setting up the Blackpool Outreach Clinic

To prepare for the outreach clinic, we published a call for volunteer student advisers. The project was voluntary for postgraduate and third year undergraduate law students, already involved in the campus-based law clinic. In terms of advertising to the public, this was done both online and offline, to take account of potential data and digital poverty in the area.¹² Contact was made with local newspapers in Blackpool, the Citizens Advice Bureau, local charities and the local MP to make sure the project was advertised as actively as possible. The participants for this study were recruited upon initial contact with the Law Clinic Manager to make an appointment. During this initial contact, the client's case was assessed to ensure suitability for the clinic. It was important, due to restrictions on supervision and Solicitors Regulation Authority requirements, that the enquiry related to one of the following areas: private family issues; contract disputes; consumer disputes; education law; neighbour disputes; wills; small claims; or property law.

Prior to the outreach clinic, the student advisers were organised into pairs, with each pair being assigned a specific case. In preparation, they conducted preliminary legal research based on the information provided by the client in their initial enquiry. In some instances, this information was comprehensive, enabling the students to conduct detailed research ahead of the meeting. However, at times, the information lacked critical details, requiring the students to adapt quickly and respond appropriately when additional issues were presented during the client interview. The student advisers met the client for the first time in Blackpool and conducted a fact-finding interview where the giving of advice was strictly prohibited. Both in person and virtual appointments were conducted to ensure we could provide a service to all prospective clients, regardless of any limitations preventing them from attending in person. After the interview, the students carried out further legal research and drafted a letter of advice to be sent to the client. This letter was supervised by a qualified solicitor either within the Law Clinic or from a local law firm, before being sent to the client.

Prior to each appointment, clients were asked if they would be willing to complete a survey on their experience of accessing legal services. They were informed when making the appointment and on the Participant Information Sheet that if they do not wish to participate, this would not affect their access to the outreach clinic. Those who were willing to participate were given simple background information. The information explained why the Law Clinic team believe the issue of access to justice is important; the project aims, information about how their data will be used and assurance was given concerning confidentiality during and after their appointment. After the appointment, the clients were asked to complete the survey

¹⁰ Carnegie UK, *Engaging the Public with Research: A Toolkit for Higher Education and Library Partnerships* www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk accessed 1 July 2024.

¹¹ Ab Currie, 'The Community Being Helped Is the Resource That is Needed' (2020) *Canadian Forum on Civil Justice*, 7.

¹² Patricia Lucas, Rosa Robinson and Lizzy Treacy, *What is Data Poverty?* (Nesta 2020) Data poverty refers to the not being able to afford sufficient access to broadband or mobile data, while digital poverty refers to not having access to digital devices.

to obtain information about their experiences of, and barriers faced, in accessing legal services.

The outreach clinic was largely based on the current Lancaster University Law Clinic model which operates on an appointment only basis. However, due to the nature of the outreach clinic, we did accommodate some drop-in clients. Typically, drop-in appointments are not permitted because of the diverse legal areas handled at the clinic and the need to ensure accurate legal advice and a high-quality service. Nonetheless, it was deemed appropriate on the day for the students to conduct meetings with two drop-in clients, to ensure access to legal services was not prevented.

The risks of having drop-in clients were mitigated by the clinic team speaking to the client to assess their suitability for the clinic. It was decided, after giving the students a short amount of time to conduct some initial research, that it was appropriate for them to run a meeting with the drop-in client, to 'prioritise community engagement over educational development and endeavour to address the unmet legal need which has arisen'.¹³ It was explained to the client before the meeting that no advice would be given in the meeting. This ensured the drop-in clients received the same level of service and assistance as the prebooked clients, whilst 'exposing students to people from all walks of life, including disadvantaged and vulnerable communities'.¹⁴

V. The survey and findings

Clients were surveyed after the initial interview to gain a better understanding of their experiences and needs. Information was gathered as to the demographics of the client, types of problems they experienced, whether they had previously sought advice for the problem and whether it was helpful. A total sample of eight clients were surveyed. This number was no less than the number of clients served during a campus-based law clinic, but it was lower than expected. Questions included gender, age, income level, areas of need, whether they had previously sought legal advice for the problem, the help they received, and if this had been helpful.

In terms of age and gender, 50 percent of clients were aged between 55-64 years, 25 percent between 18-34 years, and the remainder between 35-54 years. Gender distribution was equal at 50 percent male and female. Regarding employment status, the majority of clients were retired, while the others were either full time, part time or self-employed. Only one client reported they were unemployed due to ill health. The survey included a question to gauge awareness of legal advice providers and whether they had accessed any of these services in the past. The results found that over 60 percent of clients had previously obtained advice from a free legal advice organisation or a solicitor, however, the issue could not be resolved following the advice. Of those who did not seek legal advice from other sources, the key reasons were:

- The problem was not perceived as important enough to seek legal advice.
- Uncertainty about where or how to obtain advice.
- Concerns about the financial cost of obtaining legal advice.

Pleasence and Balmer observe that people may not recognise their circumstances as problematic, and even if they are recognised as so, they may not take steps to address them. Furthermore, the characterisation of a problem influences resolution behaviour, meaning that those who experience a legal issue may not seek advice as the problem is perceived as trivial or that taking action would not make a difference; not knowing what to do or where to go for assistance; or uncertainty about their rights.¹⁵

¹³ Lyndsey Bengtsson and Ana Kate Speed, 'A Case Study Approach: Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' (2019) 26(1) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, 185.

¹⁴ Lyndsey Bengtsson and Ana Kate Speed, 'A Case Study Approach: Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' (2019) 26(1) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, 185.

¹⁵ Pascoe Pleasence and Nigel J. Balmer, *How People Resolve 'Legal' Problems*, (Legal Services Board, 2014).

The survey found that 50 per cent of clients had used the internet to obtain legal advice but they found the information overwhelming and difficult to understand. Furthermore, it was difficult to identify what information was relevant, which options would best be suited for the problem, and what steps they needed to take to implement the advice. Literature on legal advice-seeking highlights that the complex nature of legal processes and terminology means it can be difficult to evaluate online information without legal training. Consequently, many people do not recognise legal aspects of issues and are uncertain about what to do, and whether affordable help is available.¹⁶ Those who did not consult the internet reported that they did not have a smart phone, or they did not consider it necessary to search the internet due to having an appointment with the outreach clinic. The complexity and inaccessibility of legal information and terminology can create a substantial barrier to locating appropriate advice. According to Murray, those who do seek help online are more likely to be those who have a degree of comfort with using technology and navigating legal information.¹⁷ Furthermore:

comfort, confidence, and ability to go online for legal help varies by legal issue and according to dynamics of advantage and disadvantage – including those related to income and generational and educational opportunities, as well as housing stability, literacy, language, (dis)ability [...]¹⁸

The main areas of law in which advice was sought were family issues (splitting up, division of assets, child arrangements); wills (making a will and disputes about a will); small claims (court proceedings, poor service); and property law (landlord and tenant disputes). Given that each area of law represented 25 percent, there cannot be any conclusions drawn about the order of prevalence. Finally, 72 percent of clients never applied for legal aid and 14 percent respectively did not know what legal aid was or they had applied for and received legal aid in the last three years.

The survey achieved the aim of identifying challenges individuals face in looking to access legal advice and related services, and it provided insight on the barriers experienced. However, the survey highlighted that there are opportunities for additional research, and future initiatives could benefit from lessons learned from this project. For example, although the clinic was widely advertised by Lancaster University Law Clinic and Blackpool Library Services via social media platform, the university website and the Blackpool Gazette, we had not anticipated a low participation rate, thus the result was a small sample size of clients for the survey. This raises questions as to the effectiveness of these mediums in reaching the targeted audience and whether different approaches merit consideration. Furthermore, there was limited representation from those unemployed or seeking employment, so their legal experiences are still not understood. With that said, the results still offer some helpful insights that will assist with finding ways to meet the needs of disadvantaged communities while better understanding how services are sought and used.

VI. Opportunities we identified

Students who participated in the Blackpool outreach law clinic gained all the benefits traditionally associated with clinical legal education. For example, students had the opportunity to put theory into practice in a real-world setting and develop key skills, such as interviewing and conducting practical legal research.¹⁹ Skill development and practical experience enhances the employability of students who work in law clinics. As demonstrated

¹⁶ Orla Drummond and Gráinne McKeever, *Access to Justice through University Law Clinics* (Ulster University Law School, 2015).

¹⁷ Kate M. Murray, *Achieving Digital Equity in Access to Justice* (Law Services Society BC, 2021) 17.

¹⁸ Kate M. Murray, *Achieving Digital Equity in Access to Justice* (Law Services Society BC, 2021) 16.

¹⁹ Christopher King and David Jones, 'Cui pro bono? Working on Partnership: A Possible Blueprint for the Future of Clinical Legal Education' in Linden Thomas, Steven Vaughan, Bharat Malkani and Theresa Lynch (eds) 'Reimagining Clinical Legal Education' (Hart Publishing, 2018) 37.

by Alexander's research into clinical legal education and employability, participation in a law clinic has several employability-enhancing benefits, including increased confidence in graduate job applications and during the transition from education to the workplace.²⁰ In addition, exposure to authentic experiences in a law clinic setting can instil in students a newfound sense of professional identity.²¹

Alongside the pedagogical and employability benefits, one of the main advantages of outreach initiatives is that they can expose students to the issues that are prevalent in the communities that they serve.²² The Law Clinic team decided to hold an outreach clinic in Blackpool because it is geographically proximate to Lancaster and is one of the poorest communities in the UK. By holding the outreach clinic in an area of high deprivation, students supported unmet legal need and gained insight into social and personal issues affecting a local community that they might not otherwise be exposed to.²³ As Lancaster University's law clinic is usually held on campus, for clients based in the Blackpool area who do not have transport, accessing the campus-based University law clinic could be a barrier. To ameliorate potential access issues, the law clinic offers remote (via Teams) and telephone appointments. However, these services are not accessible for all clients, such as those who do not have access to the required technology. In addition, as Bengtsson and Speed observe, clients from deprived areas may be less likely to seek legal advice because of a distrust of legal advisors or intimidation by the legal process.²⁴ The Law Clinic team therefore agreed that organising an outreach clinic in the heart of the local community, at a local library which will be familiar to many residents, had the potential to enhance engagement and maximise impact.

Another often overlooked benefit of outreach law clinics is that they can generate empirical research which can be used to inform policy making and practice.²⁵ In the Blackpool outreach law clinic, we conducted research to investigate the challenges that clients face in accessing legal advice. This empirical research will be used to produce scholarship providing important insights on social policy issues. Research into the barriers that might prevent clients from a deprived area seeking legal support is particularly important considering the cuts to legal aid brought about by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 ('LASPO'). Since LASPO, legal aid casework volumes for non-criminal matters have reduced by around 75%.²⁶ In addition, the England and Wales Civil and Social Justice Panel Survey reported that while around a third of the population experience legal issues, only 10% will access legal advice or support.²⁷ To ensure that we do not have a two-tier justice system in the UK, where legal advice is only available to the well-off, it is essential that high quality research is conducted into the challenges that clients in deprived communities face when trying to access legal services. Insights into barriers to accessing legal advice can be a gateway to effecting meaningful societal change.

Another opportunity presented by outreach law clinics is that they can develop a professional commitment to public interest lawyering.²⁸ As Wizner states, working with clients in deprived areas can help students gain an understanding that legal representation is just as vital in the resolution of the complex legal problems of the poor as it is to those of the wealthy.²⁹ In addition, working in a law clinic can increase student understanding of the legal system as

²⁰ Jill Alexander, 'Modelling employability through clinical legal education: building confidence and professional identity' (2023) 57(2) *The Law Teacher* 135, 148

²¹ *ibid* 149.

²² Scott Cummings, 'Beyond the Beltway: The Paradox of Community: A View from the Prismatic Metropolis' (2003) 13(1) *Journal of Affordable Housing and Community Development Law* 208, 211.

²³ Lyndsey Bengtsson and Ana Kate Speed, 'A Case Study Approach: Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' (2019) 26(1) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 179, 212.

²⁴ *Ibid* 180.

²⁵ Scott Cummings, 'Beyond the Beltway: The Paradox of Community: A View from the Prismatic Metropolis' (2003) 13(1) *Journal of Affordable Housing and Community Development Law* 208, 211.

²⁶ James Sandbach and Clare Johnson, 'Impacting Justice: The Contribution of Clinical Legal Education And Law School Clinics To Pro Bono And Access To Justice In England And Wales' (2019) [Impacting-Justice-Paper-IJCLE-ENfCLEpdf.pdf](https://www.lawworks.org.uk) ([lawworks.org.uk](https://www.lawworks.org.uk)) 2.

²⁷ *Ibid* 2.

²⁸ Robert Greenwald, 'The Role of Community-Based Clinical Legal Education in Supporting Public Interest Lawyering' (2007) 42(2) *Harvard Civil Rights - Civil Liberties Law Review* 569, 569.

²⁹ Stephen Wizner, 'The Law School Clinic: Legal Education in the Interests of Justice' (2002) 70(5) *Fordham Law Review* 1929, 1935.

a tool through which social change can be affected, and simultaneously develop an appreciation of the limits of the law in resolving individual and social barriers.³⁰ Anecdotally, many of our Law Clinic alumni have described their passion for clinical legal education and their commitment to public interest lawyering, regardless of the legal specialism that they subsequently practise in.

VII. Challenges we encountered

Whilst community outreach law clinics boast a wealth of benefits for both students and clients alike, it is important to recognise that there are also challenges and hurdles with setting up a project of this nature.

(1) Identifying a partner

Our Law Clinic team did not have any pre-existing relationships with organisations in Blackpool. Knowing that the project's aim was to organise an in-person, in-community Law Clinic, the first challenge was to identify a suitable partner organisation who could host the Clinic.

Four key requirements were identified:

- a) **Location:** for the Blackpool Law Clinic to be effective, it had to be appropriately located and connected with target clients and their support agencies.³¹ The venue needed to be easy for clients to find and physically accessible, both in terms of transport links and in terms of accommodating any clients with disabilities.³²
- b) **Facilities:** From a practical perspective, confidential spaces to hold client interviews, a waiting room for clients, and an area for students to work on their cases were needed.
- c) **Technology:** Onsite and secure Wi-Fi was required so that students and staff could access the Law Clinic systems remotely, ensuring work on cases could be conducted throughout the day.
- d) **A Shared Ethos & Time Commitment:** It was preferable that any partner organisation would share the Law Clinic's ethos of helping and supporting the community. Our partner organisation needed to be willing to commit their time on a voluntary basis, to plan and promote the venture, and to assist the Law Clinic clients, staff and students with any logistical requirements on the day of the Clinic's operation.³³

Identifying a suitable partner became a more complex administrative task than anticipated. A large amount of time was spent conducting web-based research to identify potential partners. This was followed by 'cold-calling' organisations to build links. A library setting stood out in terms of being accessible to the local community and the Law Clinic team were extremely grateful to Blackpool Central Library for their commitment to the project. Research suggests that for outreach to be successful, clients need to be familiar with, and trust, the provider organisation.³⁴ Public libraries play a significant role in society and are an appropriate place for outreach services due to their 'expertise, resources, spaces, services and outreach to meet present and future community needs'.³⁵

³⁰ Ibid 1935.

³¹ Lyndsey Bengtsson and Ana Kate Speed, 'A Case Study Approach: Legal Outreach Clinics at Northumbria University' (2019) 26(1) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 179, 190.

³² Suzie Forell and Abigail Gray, 'Outreach Legal Services to People With Complex Needs: What Works?' (2019) Law and Justice Foundation Justice Issues Paper 12

³³ For a list of factors that need to be considered when offering outreach services to people with complex needs, see: Suzie Forell and Abigail Gray (2019) 'Outreach legal services to people with complex needs: what works?' Law and Justice Foundation Justice Issues Paper 12

³⁴ Ibid, 9

³⁵ Kristian Møhler Sørensen, 'Where's The Value? The Worth of Public Libraries: A Systematic Review Of Findings, Methods And Research Gaps' (2021) 43 (1) *Library & Information Science Research*, 1010 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2020.1010.67>

(2) More work for the same reward?

Having identified a suitable partner organisation, there were additional time-consuming administrative duties in respect of the planning and implementation of the outreach clinic, for both the Law Clinic team and for the staff at Blackpool Central Library.

Given that we chose a community that was a 45-minute drive away from our university campus, time was used sourcing funding at departmental level to organise a coach for our students to travel. When organising community-based projects there are often additional costs that unless university departments are willing to pay, organisers may need to seek alternative forms of funding, such as from alumni or via research grants.³⁶

As with any off-campus event, risk assessments needed to be updated to include a 'community-based pop-up' clinic. Additional safety checks were made. For example, checks were made as to whether the student advisors had any medical conditions that were impacted by working off campus and when travelling, and whether any students needed any reasonable adjustments due to the change in learning environment. Emergency contact details were taken from the students in case of any problems on the day. Blackpool Central Library also spent time ensuring that the student advisors were well versed in their fire procedures, evacuation plans and accessibility measures.

Eight clients attended the clinic in Blackpool. This is comparable with the number of clients Lancaster University's Law Clinic would usually advise in one day at our campus-based clinic. Therefore, despite the additional time and resources used to organise the Blackpool Law Clinic we did not assist more clients than usual. When establishing a community-based project, the time and resource commitment for academics is an important consideration, weighed up against the number of clients advised.

(3) Is the Clinic reaching the 'right' clients, and does it even matter?

To raise awareness and visibility of the Blackpool clinic, marketing had been conducted through the University's and Library's social media channels and advertised in local newspapers. Marketing posters had also been sent to a local foodbank.

Research has found that 'hard to reach' clients tend not to approach services with which they are unfamiliar, and therefore marketing through trusted avenues of support and support groups that clients are already engaged with is imperative.³⁷ Forell and Gray note that any successful community based project has to link in with 'problem noticers' who are '...staff from other agencies and community members who may notice a client has a legal problem and may refer them to the outreach legal service'.³⁸

When establishing the Blackpool clinic, it was hoped that the service would assist clients who had not been able to access legal advice or who were 'marginalised or socially excluded' thereby making seeking legal advice more difficult. The survey results discussed earlier, however, suggests that overall, the Clinic attracted clients who *had* previously received legal advice about their legal problem from another provider, albeit the matter remained unresolved (over half of the clients had received advice from elsewhere). In addition, arguably the Clinic may not have been sufficiently visible to those who could be described as 'marginalised or socially excluded'. Forell and Gray defines factors that contribute to social exclusion as '...homelessness, disability, unresolved mental health issues [...] severe financial hardship [and] unemployment'.³⁹ Over half of the clients that were surveyed had not experienced any perceived 'problems' with income, employment, health or additional caring responsibilities in the 3 years prior to attending the Blackpool outreach clinic. This could

³⁶ See Lyndsey Bengtsson, Callum Thomson and Bethany A'Court 'The Law in the Community Module at Northumbria University working in partnership with Citizens Advice as an effective teaching tool' (2021) 28 (1) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 112 where alumnus funding was sought to support a community-based CLE module delivered in conjunction with Citizen's Advice.

³⁷ Suzie Forell and Abigail Gray (2019) 'Outreach legal services to people with complex needs: what works?' *Law and Justice Foundation Justice Issues Paper* 12, 10

³⁸ *Ibid*, 9

³⁹ *Ibid*, 1

suggest that our marketing strategy did not do enough to build links with community groups, support groups and other legal advice providers in the area who could act as referrers and who could, potentially, reach the clients who had not received advice or were 'marginalised' in society.

That said, whilst the Law Clinic team placed pedagogical value in our students being more aware of social justice and the underrepresentation of minority interests in the legal process,⁴⁰ this did not deter who could, and should, receive legal advice. McKeown and Hall advise that clinicians should be mindful not to impose their '...own moral perspective on students but to provide students with the framework to critique the world in which they live and strive to develop their own moral position'.⁴¹ In addition, Weinberg acknowledges that students have their own reasons for participating in experiential learning, noting that some students 'may wish to help the vulnerable and impoverished' and others may wish to gain legal experience 'to pursue careers in corporate law, providing legal services to the privileged'.⁴² In this sense, as long as a person had a legal problem that was within the Clinic's area of specialism and was suitable for a student advisor to work on, irrespective of whether advice had been given before, the Clinic was willing to advise.

VIII. Lessons for the future and conclusions

Reflecting on our lessons learned and the five aims of the Blackpool outreach clinic, it can be concluded that the first two aims were accomplished, namely providing legal advice to the residents of Blackpool, documenting the number of clients that attended the clinic and identifying the legal areas in which advice was sought. To some extent, we were able to identify some of the challenges the community may face in accessing legal services, but more data is needed to develop a clearer picture. To fully achieve the intended aims, a future initiative would require the following steps to be successful:

(1) Building better community relationships

Disadvantage usually comes in many forms; thus, to reach the most marginalised in the community we need to consider how clients will find out about the outreach clinic and be encouraged to use it. This may require a blend of approaches and involve building better links with voluntary and community organisations, who can help to reach and engage potential clients, and become a source of referrals to the clinic.

(2) Scaling up

A feature of effective outreach legal services is that they reach clients who otherwise would not have received legal assistance. The Blackpool outreach clinic was delivered over a single day, so this imposed limitations in on the number of clients served. To expand the impact of the project the service may be provided over multiple days to serve more clients.

(3) Targeted marketing

While the partnership with Blackpool Library is important as the connector with the community, the project highlighted the need to not only market the outreach clinic to the target community

⁴⁰ For a discussion about social justice in Clinical Legal Education, see: Jacqueline Weinberg 'Preparing Students For 21st Century Practice: Enhancing Social Justice Teaching in Clinical Legal Education' (2021) 28 (1) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 5-67. Also see: Julia Lawton, 'The Imposition of Social Justice Morality in Legal Education' (2016) 4 *Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equality* 57.

⁴¹ Paul McKeown and Elaine Hall, 'If We Could Instil Social Justice Values Through CL, Should We?' (2018) 5(1) *Journal of International and Comparative Law* 143.

⁴² Jacqueline Weinberg 'Preparing Students For 21st Century Practice: Enhancing Social Justice Teaching in Clinical Legal Education' (2021) 17.

in a more focused way, but also to front-line organisations who support them, for example food banks, homeless shelters, churches and GP surgeries.