



Legal Aid
made Accessible & Affordable

2023

Annual Report

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Legal Aid Trust: Annual Report – 2023

Emergence as a grassroots legal reform engine—transforming justice delivery, empowering communities, and shaping future legal practitioners.

Introduction

The year 2023 marked a period of unprecedented growth and transformation for Legal Aid Trust. From restructuring operational frameworks and relocating offices to expanding our legal team and initiating significant public interest litigation, the Trust reaffirmed its commitment to providing accessible legal support and justice for all. The year also witnessed strategic collaborations with academic institutions, the launch of new administrative systems, and the use of technology to streamline processes, improve accountability, and bolster employee welfare.

Operational Integration and Case Migration

Following the passing of Adv. Rakshit K.N., the Trustees, in consultation with his family, resolved to support the clients formerly managed by Nag Associates. On February 1, 2023, Ms. Soundarya J was recruited as a shared resource between Legal Aid Trust and Nag Associates to assist in this transition. She was tasked with ensuring software compliance and overseeing case status updates. A business continuity plan was developed, whereby clients of Nag Associates were contacted and offered the choice to either withdraw their files or sign new vakalats appointing Legal Aid Trust as their advocate. Where client details were unavailable, notices were sent to last known addresses and retirement memos were filed in court. This process was crucial in salvaging the goodwill of the late Adv. Rakshit K.N. and ensuring uninterrupted legal service for clients.

Despite initial resistance, Legal Aid Trust successfully implemented new legal case management software at Nag Associates during Q1 of 2023. Training was provided to staff, and software usage was monitored. Over time, the system was upgraded to include modules for WhatsApp integration, email, visitor management, and archiving. The Archiving Module, although ready, awaits full-scale implementation. Parallely, weekly internal team review meetings were introduced to monitor progress and facilitate collaboration. For operational safety and data security, internet and system-related usage policies were introduced and enforced, with specific system and browsing restrictions applied.

Staff Development and Team Expansion

The legal and administrative team expanded significantly over the course of 2023. On January 11, 2023, Mr. Sagar S.D. and Mr. Karthik P.M., former staff of Nag Associates, officially joined Legal Aid Trust. By mid-year, Ms. Haripriya N had resigned, and on June 1, Ms. Arathi B and Mr. Hariharan Y alumni of CMR University and former interns—joined the team. In December, interns Ms. Jagriti Pandey and Ms. Ragini M were brought on as paid interns. By year-end, the team had grown to seven members, a significant leap from the lone employee of 2022.

Staff welfare became a priority, with the implementation of various HR and payroll systems. Salary revisions were carried out, and all salaries were disbursed punctually on the last working day of each month. Monthly payslips were generated for all employees, while salary account creation ensured smoother fund transfers. A full and final settlement and relieving letter issuance process was instituted for outgoing staff. A biometric attendance system was launched to enhance payroll accuracy, while leave balance files were regularly maintained. Group Accident Insurance and PPF options were introduced, and a meal card system was rolled out to support daily needs. Employee insurance with coverage up to ₹2 lakh was also initiated.

Infrastructure and Relocation

In response to operational challenges at the Nag Associates office in Rajaji Nagar, the Trustees resolved to relocate to an independent office space in Banaswadi in April 2023. The move allowed closer proximity to the homes of staff and trustees, improved collaboration with CMR University School of Legal Studies, facilitated the recruitment of fresh legal talent, and enhanced the operational efficiency of Ms. Vidya Selvamony. By August, a suitable office space on Horamavu Main Road was identified, and Trustee Mr. Girish Mundakode extended an interest-free loan of ₹8.3 lakh to fund the interiors. Relocation was completed during the Dasara holidays in October 2023.

To support day-to-day functioning, a material requisition form was created for the systematic procurement of housekeeping, stationery, and pantry items using allocated monthly cash. A housekeeping checklist was finalized and implemented daily. These operational upgrades were further supported by monthly bank statement generation and reconciliation with payment records.

Community Legal Interventions

In late 2023, Legal Aid Trust undertook a major public interest litigation concerning the illegal installation of high-voltage power lines by KPTCL between Peenya and Nelamangala without legal notices, compensation, or public engagement. Acting on a request from the NGO Nelamangala To Peenya Grama Nivasigala Kshembhivruddi Sangha, the Trust filed a writ petition in the Karnataka High Court. This marked a significant expansion of the Trust's community engagement and its growing capacity to challenge systemic governance failures. In parallel, the Trust introduced an initial consultation fee and acceptance fee model to better manage case intake, and

implemented a prior appointment system for existing clients to improve efficiency and client satisfaction.

Academic Collaborations and Internships

The relocation deepened ties with academic institutions, especially with CMR University School of Legal Studies. Internships resumed with students attending daily after classes. New MoUs were signed with RV College of Law and Christ University, and internship processes were extensively documented and standardized. Internship templates—including forms, NDA agreements, internship kits, document verification protocols, diaries, and certificates—were created and deployed. An online submission system for internships, advocates, and volunteer forms was introduced via the Trust’s website to streamline outreach and documentation. Court in-charges were identified and their roles clearly defined to assist interns and visitors at various court locations.

Employee Welfare Initiatives

In continuation of the welfare focus, a robust payroll file template was finalized and implemented starting April 2023, ensuring streamlined monthly disbursement. A separate payout template was also created and executed to cover Managing Trustee remuneration, Patron remuneration, and internship stipends. These improvements reflected the Trust’s transition into a more structured and employee-centric organization.

Additionally, training and awareness sessions were prioritized. Notably, on February 25, 2023, a refresher training program on the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act was conducted at Rajajinagar Police Station. This marked the beginning of a sustained focus on knowledge dissemination among partners and stakeholders.

Conclusion

By the end of 2023, Legal Aid Trust had expanded from one to seven team members, relocated to a modern independent office, migrated numerous cases from Nag Associates, and significantly upgraded its technological, administrative, and HR systems. It deepened academic engagement, standardized internships, initiated public interest litigation, and instituted holistic employee benefits and processes. More than just a legal support organization, Legal Aid Trust has emerged as a grassroots legal reform engine—transforming justice delivery, empowering communities, and shaping future legal practitioners. The year 2023 cemented its place as a relentless advocate for equitable justice in Karnataka.

Note: As a compliance requirement, the Trust Applied for TAN and the Income Tax department issued a tan 'BLRL10204F' to Legal Aid Trust

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