

PRESS RELEASE - 18 JULY 2018

Legal Aid Practitioners Group announces winners of its 2018 Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards

The next President of the Family Division and the solicitor who challenged the Parole Board decision to release black-cab rapist John Worboys were among the lawyers honoured at last night's Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards.

Other winners included 'housing law legend' Giles Peaker, author of the popular 'Nearly Legal' blog; and Aika Stephenson, founder of the youth justice charity Just for Kids Law, who became the first person in the event's 16-year history to win a second individual award.

Lord Justice Andrew McFarlane - who takes over as President of the Family Division and Head of Family Justice on 27 July 2018 - has been named winner of the Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year's Outstanding Achievement award.

Sir Andrew, who was appointed to the Court of Appeal in 2011, will be the first former childcare legal aid lawyer to become President of the Family Division.

He was presented with his award by Baroness Doreen Lawrence OBE, in front of an audience of 500 legal aid lawyers at the central London ceremony.

Sir Andrew told the audience he had always been a champion of legal aid, which he described as a vocation.

He added:

'It is very good that we live in a country which has developed a sophisticated understanding of the importance of human rights. But those rights are no good to anybody unless people have access to them. The only way to access them is to have a key, and the key is the lawyer. Without lawyers, access to justice is just an empty phrase.'

Harriet Wistrich, from Birnberg Peirce, who brought the first ever challenge of a Parole Board decision, was named Public Lawyer of the Year.

Harriet was recognised for a string of ground-breaking successes in the past year, including a Supreme Court ruling upholding human rights as a remedy for victims, where the police have failed to investigate sexual and violent crimes; and a ruling by the High Court that disclosing the criminal records of women convicted for prostitution offences, when they had been trafficked and groomed into sex work was a breach of their Article 8 rights.

Harriet was described by the compere, broadcaster Anna Jones, as 'a dogged champion of women and an inspiration to women'.

Giles Peaker, of Anthony Gold Solicitors, was named Housing Lawyer of the Year, in part for his work on the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Bill.

Giles said that the Grenfell fire highlighted the importance of people having safe homes.

'Housing safety is at the core of what housing lawyers do. Housing is the foundation of everything, of the stability in people's lives - education, their mental and physical health, employment. If you haven't got a safe home, everything is at risk.'

Aika Stephenson was named Criminal Defence Lawyer of the Year in recognition of her ground-breaking work in youth justice. She is co-founder of Just for Kids Law, which last year became the first charity to be awarded a criminal legal aid contract.

In 2007, Aika won the Young Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year award (now the Newcomer Award), and is the first recipient of two individual LALY awards.

See full list of winners, below.

For further information or photographs, contact Fiona Bawdon, fiona.bawdon@blueyonder.co.uk; or Carol Storer, carol.storer@lapg.co.uk

LALY18 WINNERS IN FULL

1. Outstanding achievement (sponsored by Matrix Chambers)
Lord Justice Andrew McFarlane
2. Public law (sponsored by Irwin Mitchell)
Harriet Wistrich, Birnberg Peirce
3. Housing law (sponsored by Garden Court Chambers)
Giles Peaker, Anthony Gold Solicitors
4. Criminal defence (sponsored by DG Legal)
Aika Stephenson, Just for Kids Law
5. Access to justice through IT (sponsored by The Legal Education Foundation)
CaseRatio, Tuckers Solicitors

6. Legal aid firm/Not-for-profit agency (sponsored by The Law Society)
Ealing Law Centre
7. Legal aid practice management (sponsored by Accesspoint)
Adam Makepeace, Tuckers Solicitors
8. Social and welfare law (sponsored by Tikit)
Sophie Freeman, Coram Children's Legal Centre
9. Family legal aid - including mediation (sponsored by Resolution)
Tony McGovern, Creighton & Partners
10. Legal aid barrister (sponsored by The Bar Council)
Martha Cover, Coram Chambers
11. Children's rights (sponsored by Anthony Gold Solicitors)
Dan Rosenberg, Simpson Millar
12. Legal aid newcomer (sponsored by Friends of LALY18)
Lewis Kett, Duncan Lewis

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 LALY18, a crowdfunding campaign, which raised £5,370 in donations from over 80 individuals or organisations.