

Brigadier's daughter inspired

BY HER own admission, barrister Shauneen Lambe grew up in the lap of luxury. As the daughter of a brigadier, she was privately educated at £30,000-a-year St George's school in Ascot but had become "a lost 21-year-old graduate" when a work experience placement in a law court changed her life.

As we hand out £417,605 in the latest round of grants, taking the total from the Dispossessed Fund above £5 million, Campaigns Editor **David Cohen** meets an inspirational barrister behind one group that is benefiting

less group of criminalised young people who had none of the advantages I had and that I could be of use to them," she said. Ms Lambe did a law conversion course and cut her teeth doing death penalty work with Clive Stafford Smith in America before qualifying as a criminal barrister and returning to

the UK. "I saw that when you looked back on the lives of people on death row, you could have prevented what went wrong by earlier intervention. I started thinking like a doctor who understands that prevention is better than cure and that young people need more than legal representation.

"You might get them off but unless you stabilise their lives by fighting for their education, housing and benefit rights, they will be back in court."

So in 2006 Ms Lambe, 41, co-founded Just for Kids Law with Aika Stephenson, 36, a solicitor with Westminster's Youth Offending Team. With a £15,000 donation from their patron, dotcom philanthropist Martha Lane Fox, they set up in a tiny Westminster office and began to advocate for the rights of 30 young people who had sought legal help.

Today, Just for Kids Law operates from bases in Camden and Westminster and has a £300,000 budget to support a caseload of around 400, some as young as seven who have been excluded from school. The Dispossessed Fund has awarded this remarkable group a £49,745 grant to expand its operation to Camberwell, where a third hub will support another 100 vulnerable young Londoners.

It takes to £5.12 million the total given out by the Dispossessed Fund to groups fighting poverty, a scale of giving unmatched by any other newspaper. Since its launch three years ago, it has raised £10.4 million and has funded 662 groups, improving the lives of an estimated 100,000 Londoners.

Today's grant to Just for Kids Law is one of nine amounting to £417,605 that make up the final tranche of the second £1 million we received from the Big Lottery Fund last November as part of its People Powered Change approach. The balance of £593,787 was given to 13 organisations earlier this year.

The grant recipients announced today include groups supporting teenage parents, refugees, and unemployed young people by helping them into education and employment. Each grant has been assessed by our fund administrators – UK Community Foundations and The London Community Foundation – and has been passed by a final panel that includes the Big Lottery Fund and the Standard.

Dharmendra Kanani, Big Lottery Fund England director, said: "Shauneen and Aika are an inspirational example of 'people-powered change'. They saw beyond the immediate legal needs of young people facing the criminal justice system and realised they needed vital legal support in other areas of their often complex lives. Today's award from our investment in the Dispossessed Fund backs Londoners who are a powerful force in supporting the less fortunate."

Adam Morgan, 22, is a case in point. He was 16 when he first came into contact with Just for Kids Law, having been kicked out of his west London school and arrested for a phone robbery. Today, thanks to Ms Lambe and her 14-strong team of lawyers and child advocates, he is about to graduate from law school and has become a youth ambassador for Just for Kids Law.

He said: "She got me a NFA [no further action] because it was my first offence. But I had problems at home and I got kicked out of four schools and ended up homeless and in prison for fraud and

PIONEERS SOME OF



Good cause: barrister Shauneen Lambe, centre, with some of the young people helped by the advocacy group Just for Kids Law

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and what-not, but only for a couple of weeks because Shauneen got the judge to give me a second and third chance." Mr Morgan gradually got involved with Just for Kids Law. "I was taking their courses, doing work experience and applying to university with their help. Next thing, I forgot about my bad life. Most of my old friends are in prison and three are dead because of postcode gang warfare and car crashes, but Just for Kids Law picked me out the gutter."

EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD Shakarah Weir-Bartlett, from south London, is another who owes her future to Just for Kids Law. "I was homeless at 17 after a disagreement with my stepdad and I had got into £600 of debt because I didn't know about housing benefit. Just for Kids Law helped me fight Lambeth council to get the housing benefit I was entitled to and then got me work experience in chambers. I am now at South Thames College doing my BTEC in business. Without them I would be sunk."

Ms Lambe, whose easy, warm rapport with the young people is evident, said: "I look at young people like Adam and Shakarah and I feel privileged to have been able to help them realise their potential. Our record is excellent – independent reports show that we have improved our clients' lives in 81 per cent of cases by getting them into work, upgrading their housing or social care."

"But with changes to legal aid, money is even more scarce and I am worried there will be nobody to advocate on behalf of young people. This grant from the Dispossessed Fund and the Big Lottery Fund couldn't be more timely."

by death row to improve lives

THE INNOVATIVE PROJECTS THAT WILL BENEFIT



centre, with some of the young people helped by the advocacy group Just for Kids Law

JUST FOR KIDS LAW Grant: £49,745

What they do: Co-founded by barrister Shauneen Lambe and solicitor Aika Stephenson, they advocate for young people who come into contact with the criminal justice system, providing legal representation and help with housing, social security and education.
Where: Camden, Westminster, Southwark.
How grant will be used: To create a third hub in Southwark, where they will advocate for another 100 young people.

SPARKPLUG MOTORCYCLE PROJECT Grant: £49,908

What they do: Founded in 2002, in response to high motorbike-related crime in Islington's Bingfield Park area. Local resident Martin Willis, a youth worker, offers accredited courses in mechanics. It has

THE DISPOSSESSED FUND



What they do: Established by youth worker Hilary Pannack in 1998 to empower and employ teenage parents. Uses peer education, with young parents talking in schools to reduce

STRAIGHT TALKING Grant: £50,000

What they do: Established by youth worker Hilary Pannack in 1998 to empower and employ teenage parents. Uses peer education, with young parents talking in schools to reduce

teenage pregnancy rates.
Where: Nine London boroughs.
How grant will be used: To provide work and training for 20 more teenage parents per year – 10 in Southwark, 10 in Newham – as well as outreach services to 1,500 young people who attend courses.

REFUGEE YOUTH Grant: £49,748

What they do: An offshoot of the pioneering work of activist Barbara Melunsky who died in 1995. Based in Lambeth, it helps refugees aged 16 to 25 overcome language and other barriers to employment.
Where: London-wide
How grant will be used: To employ a young advocate worker for two years to run their youth leadership programme which will work with 25 young people.

The full list of grantees can be viewed online at: www.dispossessedfund.communityfoundations.org.uk/assets/ESDFGrantsAwarded.pdf

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