



25  
years

# NO ONE SHOULD FACE COURT ALONE: 25 YEARS OF SUPPORT THROUGH COURT

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# 25 years of making a difference

In 2001, Support Through Court began with a simple but powerful question: why is no one here to help people in the civil courts?

Twenty-five years on, that question has shaped a charity that has supported people on over 700,000 occasions, standing beside those who would otherwise have faced the court process alone.

Our story began at the Old Bailey, where our founder, Diana Copisarow OBE, was volunteering with the Witness Service. After a call from Lord Woolf, then Lord Chief Justice, she supported a woman facing a civil case at the Royal Courts of Justice without legal representation. At the time, no equivalent support existed in civil or family courts, where people were left to navigate complex and often overwhelming processes alone.



The launch of the Personal Support Unit, as Support Through Court was first known

Seeing this gap, Diana established the first Personal Support Unit at the Royal Courts of Justice, a civil counterpart to the Witness Service, offering free practical and emotional support, but not legal advice. What started as a single unit quickly grew as courts recognised the need and volunteers came forward.

Today, that first unit has evolved into Support Through Court, a national service across England and Wales. Our purpose remains the same: to help people understand court processes, prepare for hearings, and feel less alone at a difficult time.

Over 25 years, thousands of volunteers have supported people facing issues such as family breakdown, housing, debt and immigration, offering clarity, reassurance and a steady presence in court.

As we mark our 25th anniversary, the need is as urgent as ever. More people are navigating court without representation, and the system remains complex and daunting. The question first asked in 2001 still stands and so does our commitment to ensuring people are not left to face court alone.

# Our impact over 25 years

For 25 years, we have stood alongside people navigating the justice system alone. Over that time, we have grown and developed our services; training volunteers to offer essential emotional and practical assistance to those navigating court without lawyer.

Our service is free to use and open to everyone, regardless of income. We provide guidance before, during, and after court. Our volunteers help people understand court papers, prepare what they need to say, and face the courtroom with dignity and confidence. We are a listening ear and a steady presence beside anyone who needs support in court.

From our beginnings in London to a national network across England and Wales, we have grown into a trusted, practical source of support, ensuring that access to justice does not depend on whether you can afford a lawyer.

Every ninety seconds, someone turns to Support Through Court for help. That's more than 43 people every hour, each one facing a situation that matters deeply to them. Over 25 years, that adds up to hundreds of thousands of people supported through one of the most challenging experiences of their lives.

**721,120 support sessions since 2001**

Behind every number is a story. A parent fighting to see their child. A tenant trying to keep their home. Someone coping with the end of a relationship. A person navigating debt, employment or immigration challenges. With the right guidance and reassurance, people are better able to:

- understand court processes and expectations
- prepare their documents and arguments
- participate confidently in hearings
- make informed decisions about their future.

Last year alone, we supported people on more than 51,000 occasions in person, online, and through our national helpline. But it is the cumulative impact over 25 years that tells the full story: we have been there to provide a listening ear and a sustained, consistent presence for people who would otherwise face court alone.

# Highlights from 25 years

**2001**

After being asked by Lord Woolf to help a woman facing court alone, Diana Copisarow OBE recognised a gap in support for civil court users and went on to found the first Personal Support Unit, working in the corridors at the Royal Courts of Justice.

**2010**

By 2010, we had become a national charity known as The Personal Support Unit (PSU), based in five offices, across three cities.

**2012**

By 2012, we had opened seven offices across the UK, run by eight members of staff and 200 volunteers.

**2013**

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO), introduced in 2013, significantly reduced access to legal aid and led to a sharp rise in the number of people forced to represent themselves in court.

**2014**

We won the Guardian Charity Award for an outstanding contribution to social welfare, excellence and innovation among small and medium charities.

**2018**

We supported the pilot of the first online C100 (child arrangements) form, contributing feedback that was adopted by HMCTS.

**2019**

The Personal Support Unit rebranded, becoming Support Through Court.

**2020**

Our National Helpline, launched in March 2020 as the Covid pandemic spread, grew quickly, recording over 15,000 sessions over the year.

**2023**

Support Through Court Online, a remote service supporting people across England and Wales, launched in partnership with Nottingham Trent University.

**2024**

By 2025, we partner with Birmingham City University, Cardiff University, Leeds Beckett University, Liverpool John Moores University, Manchester Metropolitan University, Nottingham Trent University, St Mary's University, Twickenham, and the University of Sheffield, enabling students to support people facing court alone while gaining practical experience and building essential legal skills.

**2026**

We're celebrating 25 years of supporting people through court, proud of the difference we've made together.

# Building a fairer system together

Our work does not happen in isolation. Partnership has been at the heart of our impact over the past 25 years, enabling us to reach more people and strengthen the support available across the justice system.

We work alongside:

- the legal profession
- funders and supporters
- eight university partners
- community organisations and referral partners

Together, we are helping to build a justice system that is more accessible, more compassionate and more effective. When people understand the process and feel supported to present their situation clearly, court proceedings are more efficient and effective.

Disputes can be resolved more effectively. Families are better able to reach sustainable outcomes. People are more likely to feel heard and understood.

In this way, access to justice strengthens not just individual lives, but whole communities.

Over 25 years, Support Through Court has become a trusted and recognised part of that system, advocating for the needs of people without legal representation, and demonstrating what practical support can achieve.



# A lasting impact — and the future

Access to justice is not a privilege. It is a right.

For 25 years, Support Through Court has shown what is possible when people are given the support they need to navigate the legal system.

We have helped hundreds of thousands of people feel more confident, more prepared and less alone. We have helped ensure that people can engage with decisions that shape their lives with dignity and understanding.

But the need for our service remains high and continues to grow.

As we look ahead, we are building on 25 years of impact to ensure we can support even more people in the future. This includes:

- Strengthening how we measure and demonstrate our impact
- Improving access to our services, both in person and remotely
- Developing new partnerships to extend our reach
- Shaping our next organisational strategy



Support Through Court volunteers, now and then

## Thank you

None of this would be possible without the commitment of our volunteers, staff, partners and supporters over the past 25 years. With your support, we will continue to be there for as long as we are needed ensuring that people representing themselves feel confident and empowered in court, now and into the future.