

Legal centre gains backers among the great and good

A charity which gives free legal advice and representation to vulnerable Hackney residents has unveiled its first patrons.

The Hackney Community Law Centre (HCLC), which is at risk from massive government cuts to legal aid, hopes high-profile supporters such as MP Diane Abbott and human rights lawyer Louise Christian will help it campaign for more funding.

On Thursday, Ms Christian was welcomed to the law centre, in Lower Clapton Road for the first time. She has represented Guantanamo Bay inmates and the kettled Oxford Circus protesters as well as the widow of poisoned former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko.

Hackney resident Ms Christian said she was very pleased to become a patron of a charity she admired so



■ Louise Christian at the centre

much. She added: "I hope to contribute to the work of the Law Centre personally myself by volunteering at HCLC's new community legal advice sessions."

Welcoming all the patrons, Ian Rathbone, chairman of HCLC said their support was "good news for the poor and vulnerable in Hackney".

The list of patrons

- Diane Abbott, MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington
- Louise Christian, human rights solicitor
- Nicky Gavron, a former Deputy Mayor of London and currently the London Assembly's opposition spokesman for housing
- Meg Hillier, MP for Hackney South and Shoreditch
- Jean Lambert, London-wide MEP and veteran campaigner for refugees and asylum seekers
- Lord Colin Low of Dalston, member of the House of Lords and high-profile disability rights activist
- Rajiv Menon QC, Hackney resident and barrister who represented Dwayne Brooks, the best friend of murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence, and winner of the Society of Asian Lawyers award 2011
- Declan O'Callaghan, immigration barrister at Landmark Chambers
- Jon Robins, former Hackney resident, national journalist and editor of the Justice Gap blog
- Lord Thomas of Gresford QC, barrister and member of the House of Lords