

AUGUST 2024



*PROMOTING OPPORTUNITIES, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION
FOR WOMEN IN LAW*

CHAIR'S ADDRESS

A warm welcome, members to your Summer 2024 newsletter. Yes, I know: Summer 2024 – how has this happened?! I still feel like we're in Summer 2020!

Other than having to dress for every season each morning, I hope you're enjoying everything that 2024 is offering. We at AWSL certainly are. Here's a quick summary of what we've been up to.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

As mentioned in my earlier mailer (circulated in April 2024), a HUGE thank you to all of you who made the AGM such a success. The honesty of the attendees during the interactive discussions led by the incredible [Catherine Peck](#) really created a feeling of being "in it together". That evening, I was overwhelmed by the strong sense of team spirit, which is one of the really special things our AWSL network offers during these networking events.

The AGM was then followed by food and a cocktail and mocktail making session at Leigh Day's offices. The session was full of giggles, swinging arms and hips and lots of really tasty flavours. It ended with us all reading another member's piece of advice they would have given their "younger self". They're definitely worth a read if you've not had a chance to yet.

We then launched ourselves into this tenure with follow ups from the 'Reshaping Legal Services Conference' and getting the wheels in motion for an events agenda. We started to receive and circulate exclusively to our members job opportunities, including rare judicial appointments and, just before the month was out, I was able to participate in the SRA Roundtable on Consumer Protection.

I then spent April scoping out some venues for events and continuing to broaden our connections and extend our network.

We then had the lovely Anna Manning host '3 Steps to Quiet Your Inner Critic'. Lots of words of wisdom that weren't just law-specific. I intend to bestow lots of these little golden nuggets on my 4 year old niece as she grows. I took away so much, so a big thank you, Anna!

In June, we had our past-Chair, Christl Hughes MBE and Treasurer, Vicki Sales participating in the 10km London Legal Walk. Christl was walking with the Solicitors' Charity and Vicki for AWSL, both contributing to the record breaking £1,000,000 raised for London Legal Support Trust. Well done, ladies.

In July, both Christl and I met with the current Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Lead Regulatory Manager of the Legal Services Board, which made for a very stimulating and thought-provoking discussion. Mr Doyle confirmed he too found it beneficial and is keen to ensure talks with AWSL continue, and we collaborate where possible. Another great link for AWSL.

I then had the great privilege of being invited to attend Westminster Abbey to attend the Service of Thanksgiving for South Africa to celebrate 30 years of their democracy.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We are currently in the process of finalising the finer details for AWSL's Summer Party next month. It should be a great day and one I am very much looking forward to. Please keep an eye out for further details but, in the interim, a little teaser: think nautical!

We then intend to host some more training or refresher sessions, a comedy night, the Christmas Party and Ballet, just to name a few!

I also have the SRA annual Conference to attend in October - if any members have any specific questions they would like me to put forward, please do email in and I will do my best to get them answered.

We also still have some vacancies on our Committee. If you (or you know anyone who) would like to join us, please let us know by emailing awslondon1@gmail.com and I'll very much look forward to welcoming you.

Well, that's your round-robin for the last 5 months. Please enjoy the rest of this newsletter and I very much look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our Summer Party next month (albeit probably armed with my umbrella, swimwear and sledge!).

With very best wishes,

Renée Wright
Your Chair

CHALLENGES IN CHILD PROCEEDINGS IN THE FAMILY COURT

There is a 26-week time limit for the completion of care and supervision proceedings under the Public Law Outline (2014) and the Children and Families Act 2014. The Court and the parties are expected to deal with children's cases without delay and the timetable must be child focused.

However, one of the biggest challenges by far for parents and as a practitioner is the delay in Family proceedings. Most of the cases I have worked on have not completed within the 26 weeks period. Delays in Family proceedings do not only cause anxiety to the child; it can also cause damage to the child's education and general wellbeing of the child.

It is fair to say that some of those delays are caused by the parents themselves because of their unwillingness to comply with Court directions and their lack of insight to the concerns raised by the authorities. However, it is important to note that some delays are caused by the lack of resources within the Local Authorities and the Court.

It is known that a lot of local authorities are struggling with recruitment and retention of social workers which leads to a high turnover of social work staff. There are instances where there will be multiple staff changes within the life of a case. The newly allocated social worker will need time to familiarise themselves with the case and the families involved. Parents often complain that the new Social Worker does not understand their case. Parents may also complain that they have to get used to a new social worker and build a relationship all over again. This leads to mistrust on the part of the parents with the parents believing that the system is already against them.

A direct consequence of a shortage and high turnover of social workers is that it can have a knock-on effect on the timetable especially where the local authority is not able to carry out necessary visits and assessments required to progress the case in a timely manner. Another reason for the delay in proceedings is the lack of compliance by the parents themselves. It is safe to say that some parents will sometimes excuse themselves by referring to the delays caused by others and use this as a reason for not complying with Court directions in a prompt manner. Solicitors, then have the added task of educating their clients on the consequences of a delayed timetable and ensuring that the case is child focused at all times.

Delays can also be caused by the availability of experts and even with the best of intentions by the Court and the parties, the Court's timetable may not align with that of the experts.

Overall, delays are counter to the child's interest. Therefore, it is important that professionals involved do all they can to make sure that the timetable is complied with. There will be cases where unforeseen circumstances will cause delays. Where there are any difficulties envisaged, professionals should endeavour to notify all the parties promptly so that issues can be addressed without delay.

THE COURTS

Although this data is specific to private law cases, the causes of these delays are not too dissimilar in public law cases.

According to a press release by the Law Society on 23 April 2024, there is a perfect storm brewing in the Family Court system because of the rising numbers of litigants in person (LiPs) combined with increasing backlogs, delays, and chronic lack of investment in the Court system. All of these are having an impact on the Court's timetable, and it is often the case that the courts are struggling to list matters so that cases are concluded within the 26 weeks timeframe for public law cases.

IMMIGRANTS AND ETHNIC MINORITY PARENTS

Lack of understanding of their culture and norms

- Parents sometimes believe they are being victimised because they are from ethnic minority backgrounds and that there is a lack of understanding of their cultures and traditions. For example, in some African cultures, it is not unusual for parents to leave their younger children in the care of an older sibling. For example, a raised voice by an African can be seen as that parent being aggressive. However, this is not always the case because, in some African cultures, this is considered normal. It is therefore important for professionals to be trained and familiarise themselves with the cultures of the parents and families they are dealing with. It is important to note that each case is unique in its circumstance and therefore, each case should be dealt with based on its unique features.
- We live in a diverse society with parents from varying backgrounds, cultures and languages. It is important that professionals communicate with the parties in their specific language if English is not their first language and ensure the use of an interpreter at all times.

In conclusion, the Courts and professionals recognise that delays in care and children proceedings are harmful to the child. It is welcome news that CAFCASS has published a strategic plan that is going hard after delays <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/cafcass-publishes-its-strategic-plan-2023-26>

Elizabeth Eigbefoh
Francis Solicitors.

LONDON LEGAL WALK 2024

On Tuesday 18 June our Treasurer, Vicki Sales, was sponsored to participate in the London Legal Walk raising monies for the London Legal Support Trust (LLST). AWSL raised £200 and would like to thank everyone who donated through them to support the LLST. For the first time in the LLST 20 year history the walk has raised over £1million.

After a day at work, the London legal profession embarks on one of three 10km walks either around the Thames or through the Royal Parks. It takes an average of 2 hours to complete starting and finishing at Carey Street (just behind the Royal Courts). Most walkers start between 4 and 6 pm. Carey Street is closed off to cater for registration and refreshments. There is a carnival atmosphere with jugglers on stilts and food stalls to suit all tastes.

This is probably one of the few events on the London legal scene where there is such a diversity of legal professional groups from trainees, paralegals, solicitors, clerks, barristers, judges and others connected with the legal profession. A record number of walkers from the legal profession took to the streets to partake in the walk.

The representation of firms and areas they practise is varied. They all converge on this one night. It is very sociable and easy to approach other legal professionals who you might not otherwise encounter; as well as getting to know some colleagues in a less formal setting. If you happen to start off walking alone you will soon find another legal professional to chat to and keep you company on route.

LLST aims to help the most vulnerable in the vicinity of London and Sout East in need of legal advice in wide variety of practice areas. It helps to fund Law Centres in those areas. The LLST has a really vibrant website <https://londonlegalsupporttrust> so do take a look.

Vicki Sales and Christl Hughes MBE

AWSL Treasurer and Past-Chair



3 STEPS TO QUIET YOUR INNER CRITIC (AND GROW YOUR CONFIDENCE!)

If you struggle with confidence at work, your internal voice might be a major obstacle. I've experienced this myself and seen it in countless coaching clients. Learning to recognize and quiet my inner critic has been transformative, so I'm sharing my simple three-step process to help you get yours under control!

When I say "inner critic," I'm referring to that voice in your head that's critical, shaming, demanding, or angry - the mean part of your internal narrative (and yes, we all have it!). Here's how to tackle it:

Step 1: Recognise Your Inner Critic's Voice

The first step is recognizing the voice of your inner critic in real-time. You might think, "That's easy - I hear it being rude to me all the time!" But often, it's subtle, just part of the background noise in our heads, so ingrained that we don't even notice it anymore. What we need to do is bring it into sharper focus.

Start by identifying when your inner critic shows up. Is it when you're trying something new, stepping out of your comfort zone, or around certain people? Write down what your inner critic regularly says to you. Seeing it in black and white can be harsh, but it's a vital step in recognizing that voice.

Once you complete this exercise, you'll start to recognize that voice in the moment and gain the ability to pause before believing everything it says. For example, before recording my podcast, I might hear, "No one wants to hear this; it's terrible." In the past, that would've stopped me. Now, I pause and think, "Okay, that's what my brain is coming up with today." The goal here is simply to recognize it.

Step 2: Recognise the Impact of Your Inner Critic

Next, consider the impact all that criticism has on you. Often, we don't realise the toll it takes because it's been part of our background for so long. But imagine if your boss constantly said what your inner critic says - "That's going to sound stupid," or "You're probably going to mess that up." You'd feel bullied, demotivated, or even want to quit.

Research shows that self-criticism activates your stress response, impairing your ability to think clearly, plan, and be productive in the short term, and eroding your confidence in the long term.

So, think about what happens when your inner critic takes over. Do you procrastinate? Avoid tasks? Feeling anxious? Understanding the impact is crucial for quieting that voice.

Step 3: Create a New Habit

Now that you've recognised your inner critic and its impact, it's time to create a new habit—a new way of speaking to yourself. This is where you can start to form new neural pathways in your brain through neuroplasticity.

First, decide what you need instead of that critical voice. Think of it as an inner boss—how would your best boss speak to you? Write down what that voice should sound like—respectful, encouraging, uplifting. This is your new blueprint for self-talk.

Here are three ideas that have worked for my clients to quiet their inner critics:

1. **Start Getting Sceptical:** When your inner critic says, “You’re an idiot; that’s why you didn’t get that job,” question it. Ask, “Can I absolutely know that’s true?” Find three pieces of evidence against it, write them down, and move on with your day.

2. **Zero Tolerance Policy:** Implement a zero-tolerance policy for any harmful self-talk. Imagine your brain as an exclusive club with a no-tolerance policy against self-criticism. For me, it was body-shaming thoughts. I drew a line and decided not to tolerate them anymore.

3. **Create Psychological Distance:** Imagine someone saying the things your inner critic says to a friend or loved one. What would you say back? Sometimes, this distance helps you see how unreasonable your inner critic is. You can even create a character for your inner critic—mine’s called Brian. When he pops up, I acknowledge him but don’t let him influence my actions.

Remember, this process takes practice. But if you follow these steps—recognizing your inner critic, understanding its impact, and creating a new habit—you’ll notice a significant change and feel more confident at work!

For more help, take [The Confidence Assessment](#) and subscribe to the Confident at Work podcast on [Apple](#) or [Spotify](#).

15 August 2024

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SISTER IN LAW BY HARRIET WISTRICH

TRANSWORLD PUBLISHERS 2024

Born in 1960 and admitted as a solicitor in 1993 radical feminist Harriet Wistrich worked for many years for civil liberties firm Birnberg Peirce in Camden Town and is a founder of the feminist law reform campaign group Justice For Women. (“JFW”)

This book doubles as both her own professional biography and an account of some of the major miscarriage of justice cases in which she was involved.

Stories are recited of several groundbreaking legal victories with JFW challenging and taking on for example the Metropolitan Police, the Parole Board, the Crown Prosecution Service, the press and TV media, and the Prison service.

A former litigator myself I recognised the challenges of taking on any Court case (a slow, bumpy, expensive, unpredictable ride not necessarily ending in victory!) and how faced with that the author’s tenacity and determination shone through the drama of some of the most appalling miscarriages of UK justice.

High profile cases taken on by JFW listed on the website* include Sara Thornton, Sally Challen, and Kiranjit Ahluwalia to name but a few.

I would strongly recommend this book to anyone seeking to “make a difference”.

Christl Hughes

*www.justiceforwomen.org.uk